PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1990-91

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 185**

SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Monday 4 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners' Earnings Rule

1. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners are now benefiting from the abolition of the earnings rule.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): About 300,000.

Mr. Waller: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the change in the earnings rule, which was long sought by pensioners and the organisations representing them, has proved extremely popular? Does he accept that many pensioners have talents and skills, built up over many years, that are a great advantage to employers? Is not it regrettable that some employers still tend to refuse to consider applications from people over the age of 40 or 45? In considering further improvements to legislation, will he bear in mind the ability of older people to contribute in many different ways during the latter part of their working lives?

Mr. Newton: Subject to my being able to remember every part of the question, I think that the answer is yes to each proposition. I feel strongly that we tend to talk of people over retirement age as though, in some sense, they are a burden, whereas many are a huge asset to our community. I am glad to say that there are signs that, under the pressure of demographic trends, more employers are beginning to recognise that.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Minister aware that the abolition of the earnings rule is no compensation for married-couple pensioners, who have lost more than £20 a week, or for single pensioners, who have lost £13 a week, as a result of pensions no longer being increased in line with earnings? An answer that I have received from the Government shows that up to 67 per cent. of pensioners have a total annual income of less than £5,000 and that many have much less.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman, who persistently asks similar questions, equally persistently ignores the fact that as a result of a range of trends, including the growth of occupational pensions and income from savings, pensioners' average net incomes—I emphasise "average"—have risen much faster under this Government and I would acknowledge—I have done so explicitly and implicitly on numerous occasions—that many pensioners have not benefited from those trends. It is right to direct additional resources to them, as we did in October 1989 with a major increase in income support premiums for older and more disabled pensioners. We shall take a further step in that direction in April with the real increase in the basic pensioner premium.

Mrs. Roe: Although the abolition of the earnings rule has been greatly welcomed by pensioners, a number of my middle-aged constituents seek guidance on the Government's view on the equalisation of the state-pension age. Is my right hon. Friend able to comment on this highly complex issue?

Mr. Newton: As my hon. Friend says, this is a complex and wide-ranging issue. I do not think that I can add to what the Government said in response to a House of Lords Select Committee last year.

Mr. Allen: The Secretary of State had better get used to persistent questions on the level of pensions from Labour

Members. He realises, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), that single pensioners are now losing £14 a week and married couples £23 a week. Will the right hon. Gentleman explain where the proceeds are—the £23 billion that has accumulated since 1979—of the great pensions robbery?

Mr. Newton: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position. We look forward to his incisive questioning in the forthcoming months. He need look only at the extensive publications of statistics and finance that were issued on Friday, on which the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) commented, to know that there has been a large increase in social security benefits, in a variety of directions, including, not least, for long-term sick and disabled people.

Maintenance Awards

3. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence he has that under the current system levels of maintenance awards vary significantly around the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: A special assessment survey conducted last year, some of whose findings are shown in tables 13 and 16 of volume 2 of the White Paper "Children Come First", showed clear variations, for example, between different kinds of court. Analysis of DSS statistics also shows considerable regional variation in the amount paid under court orders, ranging from an average of just over £13 a week in north-west England to over £20 a week in Scotland.

Mr. Walker: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the present system is slow, inconsistent and variable? Is he aware that only about one third of mothers living alone with their children receive any regular payments and that those payments are often considerably less than the fathers could afford? Does my right hon. Friend therefore agree that something must be done?

Mr. Newton: Yes. Clearly the present system is unsatisfactory. There is wide variation and, as my hon. Friend said, the system can be slow and sometimes difficult to use. We have set out our proposals for reform, which in general have been widely welcomed. Obviously our proposals contain many points, on which people have commented.

Departmental Relocation

4. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress his Department has made in relocating work from London to the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): The development of the Department's information technology systems has already enabled us to transfer 1,400 jobs to three social security centres in Glasgow, Belfast and Ashton-in-Makerfield which will handle the backroom work of 21 local offices. In addition, a further 650 jobs from the benefit agency headquarters will be transferred to Leeds from May 1992.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. There can be little doubt that the cities that benefit from the relocation—Nottingham and Derby are two in my immediate area—find it welcome and recognise the economic benefits flowing from it. Can my hon. Friend tell the House what ongoing relocation will occur in his Department and across the board in Whitehall? What are my hon. Friend's thoughts as to the position in London as a place for the remaining core activity once the main thrust is completed?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend will know that, by 1992, about 80 per cent. of the work force of the Department of Social Security will be located outside London. This is very much a frontline operation in terms of the delivery of service. Many of the remaining core services in London will be handled by branch offices, the number of which will be increased. The objective is to enhance the quality of service and information available to those who seek our benefits.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not object in principle to the relocation, but I seek three assurances from the Minister. First, will he assure me that paperwork and applications originating in London will not be delayed by being transferred out of London and brought back again? Secondly, will the hon. Gentleman assure me that the London offices will not suffer any further neglect of their structure? Many are in bad condition and need substantial improvements such as redecoration and refurbishment. Lastly, and in particular, will the hon. Gentleman assure me that the Thames south and Thames north offices which look after the homeless and those in hostels will not suffer a reduction in service and that the people at the bottom end of the social scale will have at least as good a service as they have now, if not better?

Mr. Jack: I am glad to know that some part of government is popular. Our experience in the three social security centres leads us to believe that, for example, the error rates in terms of income support will drop from 20 to 7 per cent. and that the turnaround will drop from nine to six days—in other words, service will improve.

The hon. Gentleman asked about other London offices. One of the objectives of the benefits agency which I mentioned in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) is to consider carefully the quality of delivery of our service, wherever it is located. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I shall draw that point and his observations on the other London offices to the attention of the agency's chief executive.

Efficiency Scrutiny

5. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether his Department has made any estimate of the savings to the taxpayer as a result of efficiency scrutinies since 1978-79.

Mr. Jack: Since 1979, 26 such scrutinies looking at both the Department's performance and quality of service delivery have been concluded. These have secured savings of over £145 million. In addition to the formal scrutiny programme, we are constantly looking for other efficiency savings and in 1989-90, these totalled some £60 million, £30 million of which was from purchasing and supply initiatives.

Mrs. Currie: Am I right in thinking that the efficiency scrutiny that has been tackling fraud has enjoyed spectacular success, with savings of about £300 million a year? Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that, instead of going to those who are not entitled to it, the money is now going to those who are entitled to it, especially benefiting those in greatest need?

Mr. Jack: With her characteristic skill and ministerial experience, my hon. Friend has put her finger on the point of the scrutiny process, certainly as regards fraud. She is right to say that if we were not posting back savings of £326 million for the next financial year, we would not have been able to paint such a comprehensive picture in our recent publication on public expenditure. Our objective is to ensure that the right people receive the right help from the benefit scheme.

I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on her excellent suggestion about ways in which her own local office might improve its delivery of social security benefits. She will shortly receive in the post news of improvements in her local office.

Mr. Frank Field: Opposition Members welcome any improvement in efficiency and we are also pleased with any crackdown on abuse. In looking at the savings that can be made, however, should not the Government spend more time on a major factor—the national insurance fund? How does the Minister justify the £6 billion lost to the taxpayer through the Government's bribe to people leaving the state scheme to enter the private sector?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman's use of the word "bribe" is uncharitable. He has considerable knowledge of the social security system and he should realise that our analysis of the burden on the diminished work force in 2030 required the Government to take early action on the question of the state earnings-related retirement system. He is right that we must always pay attention to savings made as a result of scrutiny, but in that case, the action that we took was as a result of careful analysis of future trends.

Disability Working Allowance

6. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will benefit from the introduction of the new disability working allowance.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Once the new benefit is established we expect about 50,000 people to be receiving disability working allowance at any one time.

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that the new disability working allowance will promote the employment of disabled people and will encourage employers to employ them where, hitherto, they have been somewhat remiss in fulfilling the quotas assigned to them?

Mr. Scott: I believe that the new allowance will play a significant part. I can reinforce what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said—that demographic trends will be important in encouraging employers to look beyond the disability that first confronts them to the abilities that often lie behind.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Is the Minister satisfied that employers will ensure that disabled people are offered equality of opportunity and wages in jobs? Surely, one of the most ridiculous aspects of current legislation is that disabled people are offered very low-paid jobs with little incentive for further training. Will he assure us that there will be no repercussions for those who receive housing benefit if they take up the disability working allowance?

Mr. Scott: I wish to encourage to the greatest possible extent absolute equality of employment opportunity for people with disabilities. I urge employers and other agencies to ensure that that is possible. I suspect that there will always remain a group of people with disabilities who will be at a disadvantage one way or another. The benefit is being introduced so that the earnings that they have, which may be lower than those of able-bodied people in certain circumstances, can be topped up so that they can enjoy a proper job at a proper level of income.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend accept that spending in real terms has risen by 100 per cent. since 1978-79 and that that is a remarkable achievement by the Government?

Mr. Scott: I reckon that it must be 100 per cent. by now as it was 98 per cent. several months ago. That shows the Government's commitment to the interests of the long-term sick and disabled.

Mr. Alfred Morris: If the DWA is so good, why are the national organisations that speak for disabled people so united in their strong criticism of proposals for the allowance which, as the Minister knows, they see as family credits without the families? How can the Minister justify marginal tax rates as high as 94 per cent. for disabled recipients when any such imposition would be described as confiscation by non-disabled people? Will he also confirm that the allowance will ultimately be a cost saving to the Government?

Mr. Scott: I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman is so grudging about a radical and innovatory effort to ensure that those people with disabilities who want to work and are able to work can get into work. Many of them may come into work for the first time with earnings topped up by DWA. They will eventually be able to improve their position so that they work to the fullest extent possible. Although organisations for the disabled might like the benefit to be more generous than it is at the moment, the majority of the people to whom I have talked welcome its concept warmly.

Poland and Czechoslovakia

7. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help has been given to Poland and Czechoslovakia to assist them with the setting up of social security systems.

Mr. Jack: Both Poland and Czechoslovakia are working to restructure their social security systems to be based on a contributory principle and in response to requests for help in that endeavour our officials have visited both countries. In addition, three senior officials from Czechoslovakia recently spent time visiting several of our offices.

Dr. Clark: When discussing social security systems with representatives from Poland and Czechoslovakia, has my hon. Friend brought to their attention the so-called workfare system in the United States? Does he agree that workfare would avoid the Czechs and the Poles inheriting the extremes of our social security system and perhaps help them avoid having a litter-strewn country like ours by allowing more people to work for the benefit that they are receiving?

Mr. Jack: I listened carefully to my hon. Friend, but I should make it clear that we have been asked to assist Poland, Czechoslovakia and other eastern European countries in terms of methodologies and systems required to reconstruct and develop a social security system. In many eastern European countries, the concept of unemployment was officially unknown but they are now having to deal with that problem. It is not for us to determine what their policy should be, but to help them to deliver an efficient form of benefit where they believe that that is required.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Minister made it clear that computerisation in this area in the United Kingdom has not been too successful, that there are many errors and that those countries in eastern Europe should be aware of that when they decide what technology they want to purchase? While I recognise that those problems can be resolved, will the Minister assure us that those countries will not be misled into buying equipment the software for which breaks down, as it has done in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Jack: I admire the hon. Gentleman's attempt to juxtapose problems with our social security system with those in eastern Europe. However, the hon. Gentleman may be somewhat behind the times in terms of the development of our information technology. In my constituency, the centre for the information technology services agency, which I visited recently, has palpably demonstrated the great improvements in the subsequent development of the local office system in this country. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my earlier reply, he would have learnt that in social security centres in places like Ashton-in-Makerfield, we are already seeing dramatic drops in error rates when dealing with benefit. I am sure that those lessons will not be lost on those eastern European countries that are seeking our help enthusiastically in the area of information technology.

Social Fund

9. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to solve problems resulting from the increase of refusals of social fund grants and loans.

Mr. Scott: In the first nine months of this year, 38 per cent. of decisions on applications to the social fund resulted in a refusal. That is the same as the overall rate for last year.

Mr. Wray: I cannot agree with the Minister's figures. *The Observer* has clearly reported that there has been a 60 per cent. increase in grant refusals and a 50 per cent. increase in loan refusals. Does the Minister agree that that is a shocking state of affairs with regard to the social fund? It has been used and abused for the most vulnerable people in society. There is £3,500 million in the contingency fund. Surely the Government are aware that one in four children in Scotland live in households that depend on income support. Will the Minister persuade the Government to give him more resources? Since 1988, because of social fund refusals they have made a saving of £2·5 million.

Mr. Scott: My experience of the social fund is that it has responded flexibly and fairly to those who need extra help beyond that of the normal provisions of the income support system. The hon. Gentleman's own constituency has the highest social fund allocation per capita—about two and a half times the average for Britain as a whole.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: While I accept that a grant-based system meant runaway costs that no Government could continue, what should I say to an old man in my constituency, with savings of less than £200, who applied to the social fund for a bed and was told to use those savings?

Mr. Scott: Those are matters for social fund officers in the first instance. My hon. Friend will know that there is provision first for an immediate review and then for an appeal to social fund inspectors if people are dissatisfied with individual decisions. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that, in 1989-90, 35,000 people who applied for loans from the social fund were awarded grants instead.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Minister aware that, under the notorious social fund, 3 million of the poorest pensioners are freezing in the coldest snap for four years? Does he accept that the Government's severe weather payments system is riddled with unfairness because the criteria are far too restrictive, because hundreds of thousands of those on the lowest incomes are excluded, and because it is paid retrospectively so that pensioners dare not spend the money when they really need to? Is not it a shame that the Government can suddenly find £1·5 billion to spend on the Gulf and yet, at the same time, can spend only peanuts to stop old people freezing, in some cases to death?

Mr. Scott: I am not quite sure what to read into the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's comments about what the Labour Front Bench's reaction would be, if it were under the hon. Gentleman's influence, to the crisis that confronts us in the Gulf. I do not accept the description of the social fund as notorious. About 3·3 million grants and loans have been paid out to the most needy people in our society as a result of its operation.

We introduced the cold weather payments system some years ago and we have since developed it in several ways. We have, of course, had some mild winters recently, which may have reduced overall expenditure on cold weather payments, but I am confident that we shall be able to respond to the needs of people on income support who have children in the family or who have pensioners or disabled people within the household. They will be helped by the scheme.

Sir Robert McCrindle: While I accept what my hon. Friend the Minister says about the social fund, is not it a fact that, as grants tend to be replaced by loans and as the same beneficiaries tend to make applications year after year, over a period the cumulative interest which many will find impossible to pay will create a situation to which we shall need to turn our attention?

Mr. Scott: With respect to my hon. Friend, if further loans are made to somebody they are not expected to repay the second loan until the first has been completed. Of course, there is no question of interest being charged on any of the loans—they are all interest-free.

Child Benefit

10. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he intends to make any changes to child benefit.

Mr. Newton: I have already announced that, from April, an extra £1 a week will go to the eldest eligible child.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Minister agree that a Government who can subsidise chemical plant construction in Iraq to the tune of several hundred million pounds during the 1980s have no need to cheat children of £2·30 per week by freezing child benefit as they have since 1987?

Mr. Newton: What the Government have done—there has been no mystery about it—is to examine the pattern of support for families with children. In recent years, until this year when I announced an increase in child benefit, we decided that the right priority was to give extra money to the least well-off families with children. Those are families on income support and in receipt of family credit—in other words, low-income families in work. About £400 million of additional resources in real terms has gone to those less well-off groups in recent years. I make no apology for that.

Mr. Lester: Does my right hon. Friend agree that child benefit makes a valuable contribution to all families with children? Does he further agree that those who suggest returning to a tax allowance should look back at the history of this benefit, which was an allowance and was then converted? Does he agree that we should retain the value of child benefit, that it should be indexed and that it should continue to be paid to the mother, or the woman in the family?

Mr. Newton: No doubt there will continue to be a lively debate about precisely what the balance should be—not least in terms of my previous supplementary answer—between different forms of giving support to families. I made it clear in my uprating statement, and I am glad to make it clear again to my hon. Friend today, that child benefit is and will remain a strong element in our policies for family support.

Mr. Meacher: Does the Secretary of State recognise that if the Government abolished child benefit—which clearly they are considering—we would be the only European Community country with no universal child benefit? Will he confirm that, after four years of Tory freeze, child benefit per child is only half that which is currently paid in France? Will he at least have the grace to acknowledge that, unlike means-tested family credit and child tax allowances, child benefit has the combined advantages of 100 per cent. take-up, of being cheap to administer and of involving no poverty trap? Will he confirm that only child benefit achieves that?

Mr. Newton: I can only think that the hon. Gentleman has been present in the House on at least four or five occasions in the past few months without listening to what I have said. I repeated this afternoon and if the hon. Gentleman did not hear it 30 seconds ago, I state again that child benefit is and will remain a strong element in our policies for family support.

Income Support

11. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will bring forward proposals for modifications to the income support system to enhance flexibility and support levels.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): We have no proposals to do so at present. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) undertook a full review of the social security system in 1986 and introduced comprehensive reforms which took effect in April 1988. Two of our major aims for income support were to improve flexibility and to enable us to direct resources more accurately than under supplementary benefit. Since then the structure of income support has allowed us to focus extra help on families, disabled people, carers and the elderly. All this has been in addition to the normal annual upratings of benefit levels.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. In view of the increased targeting emphasis and the result that it has produced, and as extra cases of hardship may come through Members' surgeries, citizens advice bureaux and other agencies in the coming months if the recession temporarily produces further problems, will my hon. Friend ensure that any referrals from Members of Parliament and others are treated with extra special care to help the most needy and hard-pressed in the community?

Miss Widdecombe: It is an essential part of our policy that help should be targeted where it is most needed. Any representations will be carefully considered. Our offices are always seeking means to improve the efficiency and speed with which they deal with such applications.

Mr. Flynn: Has the Minister observed that part of the flexibility which the Government have introduced in the overall support given to the children of war widows has resulted in a real-value cut in the payment to them of one third? That is from 12·3 per cent. of average earnings in 1979 to a mere 7 per cent. today. Does the hon. Lady realise that those war widows, as well as many other people on invalidity support and pensions, will also be denied the value of the £1 increase in child benefit which will be enjoyed by other people? Is that what the Government call flexibility?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman has misread the position. That is surprising as he had an Adjournment debate on the subject which was answered in detail by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman should realise not only that the reasons for the discrepancies that he has identified are historical but that the difference would be about 21p. He should not exaggerate the case before the House.

Residential Care Homes

12. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received concerning the level of income support available to people in residential care homes.

Miss Widdecombe: We have received many representations from individuals and bodies.

Mr. Sims: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and for the time and trouble that she devoted to speaking and answering questions at the lobby organised last week by the National Care Homes Association. At the meeting I am sure that she realised the strength of concern among residents and care home owners about the gap between income support and the charges that have to be imposed by home owners. Has my hon. Friend had the opportunity to study the Age Concern critique of the Price Waterhouse survey? Will she study it carefully and consider making a more detailed survey of the true costs of running care homes, so that income support can be fixed at a realistic level?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend, who should be congratulated on the way in which he chaired the lobby last week, will be aware that we have already made substantial improvements to income support for the elderly in nursing homes, as we have for those in residential care. He will be aware that those in nursing homes received a considerable increase of £45 a week. Of course, we shall continue to keep the matter under review, although he will also be aware that after 1993 the position will change for new residents. I shall study the documents from Age Concern, as I shall consider all representations made to us, and my hon. Friend may rest assured that the Government regard it as extremely important that we have the levels right and that we fix them at a reasonable rate.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I say to the hon. Lady——

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No.

Mr. Flynn: I intend to raise this matter on the Adjournment——

Mr. Speaker: That means that others may not ask supplementary questions.

Mr. Flynn *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman says that he wishes to raise the matter on the Adjournment, I am afraid that that is the end of the question. Sir Rhodes Boyson—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Order. It was not the hon. Gentleman's question, so I withdraw that. I call Mr. Madden.

Mr. Madden: How many elderly people does the Minister think will go to bed tonight in residential homes fearful that they may be evicted because neither they nor their relatives have the money to pay the required fees? Does she really describe the income support limit, which will go up to £160 in April—just £5 a week above the current level—as a substantial increase? Why will not she come clean and be honest with all those people running homes, working in them and living in them that there is just not enough money? When is it going to be increased?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman would do well to study the Price Waterhouse report in some detail. We based our uprating on the findings of that report, which was a comprehensive survey. The answer to the first part of his question about how many old people will go to bed worried tonight is none.

Fraud

13. **Sir Rhodes Boyson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has of the cost-effectiveness of staff deployed on fraud work in his Department.

Mr. Jack: The cost-effectiveness of fraud investigation work is measured in terms of staff costs set against the amount of benefit saved. In the year ended 31 March 1990, the most recent for which figures are available, staff costs were an estimated £44 million. In the same period investigators achieved benefit savings of £309 million. In other words, £7 was saved for every £1 spent.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I thank the Minister for that reply. It shows that the money is well spent because the more money that we spend on genuine unemployed people, the less is spent on the non-genuine. Have the Government any plans to bring back a work test for the so-called able-bodied unemployed, as in 1601 and 1834, so that those who claim benefit and say that they are unemployed can be tested to ensure that that is the case, especially in our big cities?

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend has an enviable record in this area. I have noted his contribution to policy development, as outlined in the debate on 28 February 1984 in the House. As a result, my right hon. Friend will know that stringent rules are already in operation which require people who seek unemployment benefit to demonstrate that they are actively seeking employment. The Government have already come under some criticism for the way in which that test was to be applied, but it appears to be working because about 50,000 claimants who have already been advised of the requirements of the test have proceeded to look for work and can continue to claim their benefit.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Perhaps the Minister would also like access to the cat-o'-nine-tails, which I am sure would be equally effective.

The Department's reorganisation of benefit offices is resulting in the loss either of civil servants at the top of the scale—whose useful experience was gained at great expense—or of those lower down, who are unable to retain their jobs. What use is that, pray?

Mr. Jack: I thought that we were whipped enough as it was, without a reference to the cat-o'-nine-tails. In terms of the resources employed to detect fraud, which I believe is the point underlying the hon. Lady's question, the Government have doubled the number of investigating officers since taking office, from 1,724 to 3,179.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Sentences (Appeals)

30. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the number of appeals he has made about the leniency of sentences.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Twenty-five cases referred by me have been heard by the Court of Appeal. In 21 of them, a substantially heavier sentence was

substituted. Additionally, I have referred two cases in Northern Ireland and in each a substantially heavier sentence was substituted.

Mr. Marshall: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on a success rate of more than 80 per cent., which demonstrates the need for the powers that he exercises. I congratulate him, too, on creating a tariff structure of which judges will take account in future sentencing policies.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's opening words, but the Court of Appeal creates the structure—through the valuable guidelines that it publishes on cases that I have referred under the power that Parliament conferred two years ago.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Attorney-General agree that the peculiarity of our sentencing compared with that of other countries is not its over-leniency but that many more of our offenders spend much longer in prison than is the case in other western European countries? As to the problem of disparity, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman study with renewed interest the possibility of establishing a sentencing council?

The Attorney-General: The latter point is for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. One can make a number of international comparisons, but it is important to remember that sentencing is an art, not a science—and a very difficult one at that. It calls for sense and sensitivity, learning and not a little courage. Although the new power is valuable, it is reassuring that in only a tiny proportion of cases—about one in every 1,000—does the Court of Appeal feel it necessary to advise a junior court that its sentence was unduly lenient.

Mr. Holt: My right hon. and learned Friend's statement is much welcomed. Does he intend to take powers to stop the current practice whereby courts are allowed to impose penalty points for driving offences concurrently, when topping up would usually result in a ban? Recently in my constituency, a man with eight penalty points on his licence was given an additional three points, but they were imposed concurrently—and that after he had killed someone in a road accident.

The Attorney-General: I shall not comment on an individual case. Sentencing is a matter for the judiciary. The Executive cannot interfere, but the legislature can. Whether it should do so is initially a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Attorney-General agree that, although he has been careful with the sentences referred to the Court of Appeal, in the light of the letters that many right hon. and hon. Members receive from the public asking why a certain sentence was not the subject of an appeal, it might be helpful to have more publicity about the guidelines used by his office in determining which cases will or will not go to the Court of Appeal?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks. We recently exchanged correspondence about a painful and distressing case in his constituency. The guidelines are published in the law reports. I believe that I am right in saying that each time an appeal results in an extended sentence, the result is published in the law reports. I must, of course, adhere to the guidelines, because there would be no point in my referring a case that fell fair and square within the ambit. One must also remember that the statute refers not to a lenient sentence but to an unduly lenient sentence.

Crown Prosecution Service

31. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the number of cases prosecuted by the Crown prosecution service in 1990.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): In the 12 months to the end of September 1990, the Crown prosecution service completed 1,729,282 cases, of which 140,326 were in the Crown court.

Mr. Hind: I am grateful for that answer. Is my right hon. and learned Friend now satisfied that the Crown prosecution service has settled into its task? It has attracted a great deal of criticism from various parts of the country, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is now doing a fine job, prosecuting and dealing expeditiously with many cases?

The Solicitor-General: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks about the Crown prosecution service. It is settling in well. It conducts a great many cases with skill and confidence which is recognised by courts and the public throughout the country.

Mr. Fraser: Will the Solicitor-General compare the resources given to the Crown prosecution service with those given to the legal aid service and say why he thinks that it is right that the rate of remuneration for those prosecuting criminal cases should go up more quickly than the rate for those defending them?

The Solicitor-General: I am not sure that that is by any means always, if ever, the case—the rates should be broadly in balance. The amount of money spent on legal aid has been going up very fast this year.

The Gulf

32. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General what legal advice he has sought recently from academic international lawyers on legal issues affecting developments in the Gulf.

The Attorney-General: I give advice on my own responsibility. The question whether I have sought the views of others is normally confidential.

Mr. Dalyell: As a member of the War Cabinet, what advice has the Attorney-General received on the percentage of bombing of military targets in Kuwait, which is significantly less than the pounding of Iraq? What advice has he received about which United Nations resolution justify the bombing for 18 days of Iraq? Has he received any advice on whether certain animal species, such as the dugong, the sea cow and the green turtle, have a right to exist, not to be annihilated by human Front Bench folly?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman knows that any advice that I give and any advice I receive as a Law Officer is, for good reasons, confidential. Throughout this affair, Britain has committed itself to acting strictly in accordance with international law. In that context, the

principles of international law require that account be taken of two factors when planning attacks on military objectives. First, civilian losses, whether of life or property, should be avoided or minimised as far as practicable. Secondly, we should not cause civilian losses that are disproportionate to the military advantage expected from the attack as a whole. The hon. Gentleman will know, because it has been frequently stated by the Prime Minister and others, that British military commanders have been instructed to comply with those principles.

On the wider question with which the hon. Gentleman concluded his remarks, regrettable though environmental damage is, the responsibility for it lies with President Saddam.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we wish that the conflict had never been started, but that, as it has been started, it must be finished? Does he further agree that the United Nations resolution on which the war is fought is one of humanity—finishing the war as soon as possible? If we continue with the attitude shown by some—luckily a minority—in the House, all tyrants will always prosper and justice will never be done.

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend recalls accurately that the Security Council's operative resolution, No. 678, calls on member states to take such measures as are necessary to implement resolution 660, which calls for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait of the Iraqi forces, and to restore international peace and security in the area. That is what this country, together with its allies, are about.

City Fraud

33. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General whether he has any plans to meet the director of the Serious Fraud Office to discuss City fraud; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I expect to meet the director again shortly to discuss matters of departmental interest.

Mr. Skinner: At those meetings with the director, does the Attorney-General raise with him the question of the £600 million fiddle at Harrods? Do they discuss the ways and means of how to resolve the matter, or do they say, "Well, we will give it a nod and a wink and reckon it has not happened", because some of the participants were too close to the Tory Government? If they do not deal with that, what will the Attorney-General do about the recent report on Blue Arrow which suggests that action should be taken against the executive and non-executive directors of that firm? What action will he take—or do the Government want to concentrate on the working-class people who might be caught with a bit of social security fraud at £15 a week? Are those the double standards in which the Attorney-General believes?

The Attorney-General: It may not make much difference to the hon. Gentleman, but when I consult the director I consult her, not him.

As for Blue Arrow, among the cases in which preparatory hearings are already in progress is that of County NatWest, which embraces the other matter. The hon. Gentleman should perhaps give credit to the fact that, since its inception, the Serious Fraud Office has prosecuted 43 cases and 95 defendants, of whom 60 have been convicted.

Mr. Skinner: Are they all in open prisons? The Kuwaiti royal family——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Attorney-General: We all know that the hon. Gentleman is tortured by self-doubt, but I am afraid that I must continue to intrude on his soliloquy.

Mr. Skinner: They will not understand that outside.

The Attorney-General: "To Beast or not to Beast" is the hon. Gentleman's question; my question is the one that he originally asked, and I am answering it.

Decisions about whether to prosecute are made on the basis of the code for Crown prosecutors, which has been scrutinised by Parliament and which takes no account whatever of the partisan considerations that the hon. Gentleman has at the very heart and core of his being.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Namibia

36. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what developments have there been in aid to Namibia since independence.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): On Namibia's independence last March, we announced £10 million of aid for commitment over three years. We have agreed with their Government that education should be the first priority. A number of initiatives are already under way. We are also helping with police training, public-sector reform and the resettlement of returnees, and we are exploring the possibilities for assistance in other sectors, including agriculture and health.

Mr. Pike: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does she, however, recognise the importance to Namibia of development of its fishing industry, which provides employment prospects and also increases public revenue? Will she consider giving aid for the development of that industry, and confirm that she recognises the associated problem of Walvis bay and what it means to Namibia?

Mrs. Chalker: I have just returned from Namibia. While I was there, I was able briefly to discuss the whole question of fisheries. The hon. Gentleman may remember that, just before independence, Dr. John Beddington of Imperial college, London undertook a study and made some preliminary recommendations on fisheries management. We want to explore the scope for further support in that regard; we have offered the Namibian Government further assistance, but they have yet to respond.

As for Walvis bay, we voted on Security Council resolution 432, advocating its integration into Namibia. We continue to believe that the issue can best be dealt with by means of low-key bilateral negotiation, but we have offered to help and have put in the right words in the right places.

Mr. Burt: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us believe that our development aid has been very well spent in Namibia, helping to fashion the possibility of

success from a near-disaster? Does she feel that there are any lessons to be learnt that will be helpful in the development of the new South Africa, where aid and assistance will also be needed to help the people emerge from another near-disaster into success?

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He knows that we began English language teaching for Namibians long before independence. In South Africa we have been providing teacher training for English language and other subjects through the Molteno project for about four and a half years. By giving English language and other educational training, we are laying the foundations, but we must build on that through projects such as public sector reform, which we are carrying out in Namibia. We must also ensure that each programme is tailored to needs. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall be looking at the projects in South Africa which now amount to about £10 million of aid to black South Africans.

Cambodia

37. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current position in Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: We are providing humanitarian assistance to Combodians by supporting the activities of British non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies inside Cambodia and in the camps along the Thai border. We are ready to consider with other donors how Cambodia's reconstruction and development needs can be met in the context of a comprehensive political settlement.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Minister for that reply. In the light of today's reports about renewed fighting between the Cambodian Government and the Khmer Rouge, and the comments in the current *Jane's Defence Review* on the strength of the Khmer Rouge, may I ask the Minister once again to state in the clearest possible terms for the public record that this country has never given assistance to train the military of any description fighting against the Phnom Penh Government?

Mrs. Chalker: I do not know how many times I have said this before, but I shall say it again. We have never given and will never give support of any kind to the Khmer Rouge. I much regret it if fighting has again broken out because, as I think the hon. Gentleman knows, we have repeatedly called on all parties to stop fighting and reach a comprehensive settlement. The formal ceasefire and an end to outside arms supplies are integral parts of the draft comprehensive settlement document. The Cambodians have already shown that a ceasefire isolated from a settlement just will not work. Therefore, it has to be ceasefire and settlement under the terms negotiated by the permanent five.

Mr. Lester: Will my right hon. Friend use her considerable talent to try to persuade her colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to enable the Phnom Penh regime to understand the details of the United Nations plan? There are difficulties in the military and in the supervision concept. It would be helpful if my right hon. Friend were able to make contact through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Phnom Penh regime so that it could have a much clearer understanding of the value of the United Nations plan and the fact that it is a real hope for Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall be very pleased to talk to my noble Friend who takes the political responsibility for that, but, of course, we are both in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I hope that the co-chairman of the Paris conference, who visited Hanoi last weekend and put pressure on the Vietnamese to accept the draft settlement document, will persuade Hun Sen to do likewise. I know that they had a long conference, but so far we have not had reports of its outcome. I shall be in touch with my hon. Friend when I have anything to tell him about that weekend conference.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Minister agree that many of us believe that to be effective there is no point in simply calling on both sides to have a ceasefire, but that we must, in view of the terribly poor condition of Cambodia, reopen direct bilateral aid to Phnom Penh, because failing to do so gives an economic weapon to the Khmer Rouge?

Mrs. Chalker: Unless there is a ceasefire and an end to hostilities, we shall not be able to carry out in practical terms what the hon. Gentleman asks for. As he knows, we already give humanitarian aid. We also give aid through UNICEF, the World Health Organisation and the World Food Programme, but until there is a ceasefire and fighting stops, there is no way in which we can be more active and more helpful to the Cambodian people, however much we might wish to be so.

Mrs. Clwyd: Month after month the Minister comes here and talks about the humanitarian aid that we provide —very little through NGOs. Does not she realise that it is a fleabite compared with the amount of assistance that Cambodia, devastated by war and economic isolation over the past few years, needs? Does not she realise that one in five children dies from waterborne diseases? The water reconstruction project in Phnom Penh has come to a halt because the Soviets have withdrawn their aid. Does not the Minister know about the $49 million in the United Nations Development Programme account that is ready to be spent in Cambodia? Surely it is not beyond the wit even of the present Government and of the Minister to do something about this dreadful situation.

Mrs. Chalker: Sometimes I wonder whether the hon. Lady lives in the real world. I should be happy to see the United Nations money spent—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Lady will listen for a moment she will get an answer. The Government are fully ready to consider requests from the United Nations agencies, from the NGOs and from Voluntary Service Overseas in respect of 1991. We are prepared to help, but in the absence of a ceasefire—while hostilities continue—it is not practicable to undertake what the hon. Lady asks for.

Aid Programmes

38. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what weight is being given to sound economic management as a criterion for aid programmes to any country.

Mrs. Chalker: Sound economic management is a very significant factor in assessing whether our aid can be used effectively in any country.

Mr. Taylor: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the contents of the International Monetary Fund report on the Soviet Union which indicates that, with the failure of perestroika and the failure of the Soviets to introduce proper market mechanisms, giving aid to the Soviet Union is almost like throwing money into the Volga? Does she realise that this report has principles in common with our aid programme elsewhere in the world, including Africa? Is it being studied carefully?

Mrs. Chalker: I believe I am right in saying that Jean-Michel Camdessus, the president of the IMF, has set up a committee to consider the report's conclusions and recommendations. Our assessment is that it is a very valuable report.

In answer to my hon. Friend's second question, I recommend that he looks at the World bank's special programme for Africa proposals for the second phase. These show how, when due allowance is made for the statistics, the countries that follow a strong economic reform programme perform rather better than those which do not bother to do so. It is a lesson for all concerned that sound economic recovery programmes do bring success, even though slowly.

Baltic States

39. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further consideration has been given to changes in technical aid to the Soviet Union in light of events in the Baltic states.

Mrs. Chalker: With our partners, we are watching developments in the Soviet Union closely. We have suspended EC technical assistance, although emergency and food aid may continue where we can guarantee delivery direct to those in need. There is no Government-to-Government aid to the Soviet Union.

Mrs. Ewing: Although I welcome the Minister's response on the ending of technical aid to the Soviet Union, may I ask her to assure the House that the British Government will be in no way complacent in ensuring that pressure on the Soviet Union is maintained with a view to securing a peaceful resolution to events in the Baltic states? As there have been 20 deaths in the Baltic states in just three weeks, she must agree that there is no room for complacency. Can she assure us that no deal whatever will be done and that a blind eye will not be turned for the purpose of securing continued Soviet Union assistance in the Gulf?

Mrs. Chalker: As I said during previous Overseas Development questions, we deeply deplore the actions of the Soviet troops in Vilnius and Riga and their tragic consequences, which the hon. Lady mentioned. The behaviour of those troops is totally unacceptable and we have made our concern very well known to the Soviet authorities. The hon. Lady may like to know that the Foreign Secretary summoned the Soviet chargé on 21 January to underline our concern, and in every forum in which we have encountered the Soviets we have made those concerns known. However, it may still be necessary for us, where possible, to help people directly through humanitarian aid.

BREL (Redundancies)

3.33 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announcement of 1,200 redundancies in British Rail Engineering Ltd. in Crewe, Derby and York."

The matter is specific, because BREL announced these 1,200 redundancies on Friday morning of last week. It is important because, at the time when practically every part of British Rail, including its freight and passenger services, desperately need investment in new rolling stock, we are dissipating a skilled work force that is capable of competing with anyone in the world.

It is a matter for urgent consideration, because there is no conceivable justification for a firm that, fewer than two years ago, took over the taxpayers' assets at considerable benefit to itself and announced a profit of £22·4 million, now imposing this unacceptable level of unemployment. If the House of Commons does not concern itself with the unemployment of a large number of skilled engineers, it will not be fulfilling its proper task, which is to make sure that, in a difficult time, our manufacturing industry can compete.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that she thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announcement of 1,200 redundancies in British Rail Engineering Ltd. in Crewe, Derby and York."

I have listened with care to what the hon. Lady has said, but she knows that the decision that I have to take is whether to give this matter precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I hope that she will have other opportunities to raise the matter, but it does not meet the criteria of the Standing Order. Therefore, I cannot submit her application to the House.

Posters (Belfast)

3.36 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your help, in view of the outrage that is felt in Northern Ireland, especially by the families of the Ulstermen who are serving in the Gulf conflict, about the threat issued by the governor of the Maze prison, Mr. Bill O'Loughlin, and the executive chairman of the Ulster Bus depot in Belfast that all workers who put up a solidarity poster, as issued in *The Sun*, will lose their jobs. Have you had a request, Mr. Speaker, from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or any of his Ministers about making a statement on this matter?

Mr. Speaker: I have not had any request for a statement to be made on this matter, but I am certain that what the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard by Ministers on the Front Bench, and will be taken into account.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Another aspect of this matter directly concerns Parliament. You will remember that Parliament passed the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) 1989 which established the Fair Employment Commission. I am sure that Parliament never intended that the commission should abuse its powers by supporting this utterly squalid campaign against Her Majesty's forces in the Gulf. Would it not be appropriate for a Minister to come to the House as soon as possible to make a statement about the anti-British, anti-forces attitude of this creature of the Government?

Mr. Speaker: As I told the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), this is a serious matter and I am sure that what has been said will have been heard by those on the Front Bench. However, I am afraid that it is not a matter for me.

BILL PRESENTED

War pensions (Disregard)

Mrs. Alice Mahon, supported by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Bob Cryer, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Ms. Mildred Gordon, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Bernie Grant and Mr. John Battle, presented a Bill to provide that income from war pensions shall be disregarded for the purpose of assessing entitlement to any benefit payable out of the Social Security Fund or the National Insurance Fund: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill. 73.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Food Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Census (Confidentiality) Bill *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That the Census (Confidentiality) Bill *[Lords]* be referred to a Second Reading Committee.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Family Policy

3.38 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I beg to move,

That this House, recognising the fundamental importance of the wellbeing of the family as the basis for a stable, responsible and free society, believes that Government policies should be concentrated not on supplanting the role of families but in continuing to support and increase their confidence and competence by extending choice in employment, education, health, housing, pensions and personal social services, while pursuing sound economic policies which raise living standards, encourage savings and provide reliable and effective public services.

Anyone winning one of these highly prized opportunities to present a motion of one's very own is sometimes congratulated on having the good fortune to win the ballot, but I do not want congratulations. Like anyone else, I had only to find my way to the No Lobby and manage to sign my name. It is on winning that the real difficulty begins, for it is necessary to choose a subject. Why not choose something simple such as nuclear physics or local government finance, for example? As I thrive on a challenge, I decided to choose to debate issues concerning the family. Hence my motion.

I know that, from the beginning, I shall get into trouble for choosing to debate such a subject. Aspects of family policy intrude into almost every Department of Government. On the Benches in front and around me I see right hon. and hon. Members who are steeped in detailed knowledge of any issue that I might raise. There are riders of hobby horses and authors of books or pamphlets. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is in his place to add what wisdom he can to the debate.

I shall start the trouble by defining what I mean by family. I have selected the third definition in the "Shorter Oxford English Dictionary". That definition of family is:

"The group consisting of parents and their children, whether living alone or not; in a wider sense, all those who are nearly connected by blood and affinity."

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, who will contribute to the debate and who I am pleased to see on the Government Front Bench, wrote something in *The House Magazine* a week or two ago that put the matter more colloquially. She wrote:

"if you ask people whether they have a family, they believe you mean children, when family of course includes parents, grandparents, aunts and cousins."

I agree with my right hon. Friend. We must not consider children alone in this debate.

There is a vital public interest in the success of the family. It is where earliest education takes place, where the individual experiences a sense of security and of purpose, and where responsible attitudes should be based from an early age. If parents, who are the first to reap what they sow in this respect, do not or cannot cope inside the home, why should we expect schoolteachers, police officers or others to do so outside the home? In addition, a country in which strong, lasting family values are considered normal, is much more likely to have citizens who contribute to the community and understand the benefits of freedom and obligation. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary put that in a wider setting when he was a distinguished Home Secretary. He said:

"Freedom can flourish in a community only where shared values, common loyalities and mutual obligations provide a framework of order and self-discipline, otherwise liberty can quickly degenerate into narrow self-interest and licence."

Sometimes family influences are not always for the best for every child. The poet Philip Larkin put his line of thought succinctly. As this is a family occasion, I have had to bowdlerise one word of his famous or rather infamous lines. He wrote:

"They mess you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you up with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were messed up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were soppy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself."

Despite those lines of some pessimism, for most people the importance of the success of the family is linked inextricably with the success of marriage in providing stability. A commitment to the binding nature of marriage should at the same time mean acceptance of a mutual obligation to care for the children of the marriage. That is if we insist on not taking Philip Larkin's advice in the last lines of the poem from which I quoted.

This is where our divorce laws and arrangements for marriage guidance and conciliation are so significant. I do not want to moralise. Indeed, I recoil from moralising: I believe that that is for bishops, both the official ones and the honorary ones who sit on the Benches in this place. I am not a philosopher either. I agree with Henry Adams definition that philosophy is

"unintelligible answers to insoluble problems."

I strongly believe, however, that for the sake of the children of a marriage, it is usually by far the best course to try to keep the marriage together. Apart from purely private considerations, there is a significant public interest in doing so. There is the expense of broken marriages, which is often thrown on to the state, and the desperate disruption and unhappiness that are so often caused to the lives of children, with the variety of anti-social consequences that that frequently has for society.

The Government can specifically help in the crucial area of marriage and divorce law. They have done so already: the Children Act 1989 is very much to their credit, with its emphasis on the child's welfare, its obligation on parents, local authorities, social services and other agencies to help, its fostering of a fair understanding and approach to custody and access wrangles, and its crucial recognition of the role of grandparents.

But there is more to do. It is now possible to divorce on grounds of irretrievable breakdown after only one year of marriage. The Law Commission's recent report, entitled "The Ground for Divorce", which was debated in the other place last Thursday, proposes that, in effect, no divorce should be granted until at least two years after the marriage, including a one-year enforced wait for possible consideration and reflection, with the priority being to save the marriage—and if that is not feasible, at least to consider and agree essential questions on the upbringing of children, maintenance and property before the marriage may be dissolved.

There is much sense in so changing the law. Of course, at times help must be available through counselling,

reconciliation or conciliation services, which brings me to a hobby horse of mine—Relate, which was formerly the Marriage Guidance Council. It provides excellent services in trying to keep marriages intact. Hon. Members will be well aware of its work.

I know my Portsmouth branch well and, given what it has at its disposal, it is good at what it does. It is no different, I suspect, from any other branch in the country. It has a waiting list of several months, principally because of a lack of trained counsellors. The Government can help by increasing grant aid, particularly to meet the expense of recruiting and training such counsellors. That makes sense not only in human but in financial terms, as the cost of broken marriages to public expenditure through legal aid and medical and social services, is monumental. Grants should not be increased to such an extent that incentives to voluntary aid and fund raising are stifled. I give credit to the Government for current provision, but more would be welcome and would be most efficiently spent, certainly in Portsmouth.

If a marriage cannot be saved, organisations such as the Hampshire family conciliation service stand by to help in an atmosphere of least bitterness, settling the essential questions of children, maintenance and property—a settlement when it is hoped will endure in co-operation between the parties after the marriage is dissolved. That service, like so many similar ones, is looking in particular to my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor to make a strong case for increased Government support to supplement substantial voluntary effort.

I now want to seize the nettle of employment issues, where the cry, "Women and children first," takes on an added meaning. In considering these matters, I want to say something about education and the interaction of taxes and benefits.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My hon. Friend mentioned the role of grandparents. Does he agree that they have a role to play, particularly where, for some reason, the parents are inadequate or the marriage is breaking down? Grandparents often have much love and interest for young children. They have a role which the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has tried to enshrine in legislation, but I appreciate the difficulties involved. Should not grandparents, who may not have much income and who may fall on difficult times in their 70s and 80s, be able to call on the younger members of their family for support, rather than the taxpayer all the time?

Mr. Martin: My hon. Friend makes his points lucidly and eloquently. I wholly agree with what he says and with the sentiments behind it. I am glad that he added those thoughts to the debate.

The interaction of taxes and benefits has a bearing on employment, particularly the employment of women. This is an area where ideas are difficult to put into practice. I have already said that I am not a philosopher. I have so far avoided quoting Burke, which is very difficult in such debates. His modern counterparts who have helped my thinking on these matters in preparing for the debate are David Willetts, the director of studies at the Centre for Policy Studies and, after the next election, my neighbour in Havant; my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), pamphleteer extraordinaire, who has written some sound sense on the subject; and Ludger Eiling of the Konred Adenauer Foundation. I am grateful to them for their contributions.

As hon. Members understand, married couples without children have the least difficulty in making ends meet. They have the most unhampered choice as to whether one or both should work in paid employment. The real tests begin when the first child arrives. If only one parent is left alone to cope, those tests naturally multiply. In approaching the issue of mothers who are either in paid employment outside the home or are staying at home—I shall not say "not working", because looking after the home and children is certainly work, as hon. Members would agree—the Government's role should be strict neutrality. They should see how people live and then encourage, or at least not inhibit—if one can get politicians not to poke their noses in—the patterns that those people have chosen for themselves.

There should be no endless debate about whether mothers should or should not go out to work. The important factor is choice. When all is said and done—this is a little-known fact—most mothers of young children do not go out to work and most of those who do are part-time. Only when children are 10 or over does full-time work outside the home become most popular. These days, sensible employers recognise that women's work patterns reflect their role as mothers over a number of years—leaving work, coming back, retraining, leaving work and so on. Employers cannot ignore such a valuable source of labour, and the best certainly do not.

For years it has been accepted that families with children, whether or not one or both parents are working outside the home, require extra support. Parents make a variety of child care arrangements which, I am well aware, is a highly controversial matter. This is where the extended family—grandparents and others—plays a particularly valuable part.

In the formation of policy, it is important to recognise that two thirds of children of full-time working mothers and almost 90 per cent. of children of part-time working mothers are cared for by a grandparent, a husband or other relation. As a tried and tested method of financing child support or child care services, child benefit beats child care vouchers or child care tax allowances or a return to child tax allowances.

The only fair and evenhanded help is that which is available to all mothers with young children, regardless of whether those mothers work. In the early years, when a reduction to one wage or no wage provides the biggest strain, I should like an increased child benefit to concentrate on children under five.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I strongly agree with what the hon. Gentleman has just said. Not only should child benefit be increased but the 12 per cent. reduction from which child benefit suffered between 1979 and 1989 should be reinstated. If it is not, the neutrality for which the hon. Gentleman argued is not possible. In other words, taxation would be a punitive measure against marriage and family life.

Mr. Martin: I was speaking about what I should like to see as future policies. I welcome the fact that the recent measures of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security gave more to the eldest child in a family. My suggestion about increasing support for under-fives is

[Mr. Martin]

a logical progression along that road and I should like to encourage that move. I want not to go over the past but to look positively to the future to obtain the best possible method.

Nurseries and creches provided by employers at the workplace or elsewhere—people often do not realise that they are supplied elsewhere—are now encouraged through the tax system and not taxed as a perk. That is only one way. Independent nurseries, child minders, specialist day care centres, family clubs and playgroups are other ways, and more are needed.

Further help for mothers who buy such child care, whether or not they go out to work, could also come from a simple change in VAT regulations. If nurseries became zero-rated rather than exempt nursery providers could reclaim VAT on many costs and therefore charge cheaper and more competitive prices. That would not favour a particular form of child care, because at present, playgroups, home helps and child minder services—believe it or not—do not suffer from that particular VAT problem. It would merely remove the bias against nurseries.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I wholeheartedly endorse what my hon. Friend has said. However, I should like to add one comment. Does my hon. Friend agree that, historically, the whole system of education for the under-fives has not been handled well? Are not such affairs handled much better on the continent? Does not my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to move towards full provision of education for the under-fives?

Mr. Martin: My hon. Friend has anticipated precisely my line of thinking. I agree that, for older children, we need to improve opportunities for nursery education. I have stated some of my ideas on how to improve education for children up to the age of five. There are many ideas from the continent, such as those of Ludger Eiling of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. We should investigate what is done abroad and seek better practice here.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that cash-strapped Labour local authorities have pursued such policies, against the odds, for years? They have often been rate-capped because they have insisted on making nursery education provision available. The national statistics, drawn up by those who are interested in nursery education, show that Labour local authorities are at the top of the league in terms of nursery provision in the United Kingdom, although they are pressed by central Government to cut their moneys. Are not Conservative Members inconsistent to argue a purist position on nursery education while voting to cut local authority budgets, thus preventing them from providing the very services for which the hon. Gentleman argues?

Mr. Martin: I shall discuss shortly the contribution that Labour may or may not be able to make. The other day, I visited a school in my area which has excellent nursery provision, some for the morning and some for the afternoon. I shall not go into the details of local government finance, but if Labour authorities have been rate-capped, it is because they have often done much that is not helpful in this respect. If, instead, they spent money on real provision—as opposed to what is happening in Lambeth at the moment—we should get some sense. There is a distinction between the Government's views and those of the Opposition on this issue.

We need to improve opportunities for nursery education for older children. That is especially vital for lone-parent families. At present the social security system —principally through income support—while providing more financial help than ever before frankly does not encourage a parent who is able and willing to work to do so. For working families, the family credit arrangements have proved successful. The lone parent, however, is most likely to become most dependent on the state. Good nursery education means that that parent can exercise more real choice as to whether to earn a living. The result is that both parent and child, as well as the state, are better off, and family values are more likely to flourish in a happier home.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Will my hon. Friend accept that there must be some change in nursery education practice if it is to become an alternative form of child care for the under-fives which helps mothers to go back to work? Many local authorities provide nursery education only in morning or afternoon sessions for different children at each session. If there is full-day provision, that will start at about 9 am and finish at 3 pm or 3.30 pm. That is no good for a lone parent who wants to work full-time instead of part-time.

Mr. Martin: I recognise the shortcomings in the provision of nursery education, and that is why I have raised the matter today. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Secretary of State for Education and Science, she used to promote those ideas. They should be re-established in future Conservative party policy. The Government would then be able to adopt my ideas.

Housing is fundamental for families, because housing, in the sense of a satisfactory roof over a family's head, is important to a family's well-being. Providing adequate and affordable housing for all remains a seemingly intractable problem despite the intentions, actions and numerous Government initatives over several decades, including the expenditure of thousands and millions of pounds.

It would be ludicrous for the Opposition to criticise us for indifferernce or for not trying with respect to housing matters. None of us wants inadequately housed people trooping into our surgeries week after week. Discounting natural feelings of humanity, only a fool would wish hardship on his constituents—and Ministers have constituencies as well.

Since the war, the landmark features have been increasing home ownership, the continued steep decline of private rented homes, the dominance of local authority housing for rent and, in recent years, the rise of housing associations. I must make it clear at the outset that the state has a role in housing. Of course social housing is necessary. However, I have a persistent feeling that many of the problems have been made worse, not better, by the paraphernalia of both local and central Government which, have over the years, continually stifled or ignored the best methods of supply. I have never been able to understand why it should be acceptable that the supply of food and clothing and a host of other human needs and

wants can be left to free enterprise, although, of course, reasonably regulated by general rules of contract, consumer protection and safety, while the problem meeting the housing needs of those who cannot or do not wish to buy cannot be resolved in that way.

Housing needs have been firmly hedged about with draconian rent legislation and controls which have acted as a powerful disincentive to supply, while fiscal initiatives such as mortgage interest relief have distorted ownership and the capital cost of homes. I will be controversial and state that, in the next Budget, the higher rates of mortgage interest relief should go and we should see the beginning of the end of that relief. I am pleased that it has been withering on the vine at £30,000. However, we will have to bite the bullet in future and get rid of it altogether to allow that money to lower taxation bills all round and do some of the things that we should do in the sphere of housing.

Mr. Alton: While I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, does he accept that there are 850,000 young people in bedsit accommodation and 30,000 homeless in the country at the moment? How would the housing approach that the hon. Gentleman has just outlined help those people?

Mr. Martin: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the existing housing position. I am looking to a better approach in future. The market has not met the needs of the people to whom the hon. Member for Liverpool Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) refers. They are fed and clothed, but they are not housed or sheltered. Why do we not use the same market methods for those people as we use in respect of food and clothing?

With regard to rental accommodation, there is an ever-increasing reliance on local authorities, and more recently on housing association provision. That will never satisfactorily meet the demand. The result of such reliance, which we have seen over many years and which is clear from the number of people in bedsits, is rationing and queues. By embracing such half-measures in rented housing, we are like the hopeful wooers of Penelope, who made love to the waiting women because they could not reach the main objective.

In this country, we must often queue to get out of a supermarket rather than to get into it. Clothing is supplied in such abundance and with such cut-throat competitiveness that it spills out on to the streets alongside food market stalls in every part of the land, and it is available to the poorest at the best possible price.

We cannot look for solutions from Opposition Members. They created many of the problems because of a lack of confidence in ever re-creating the market. The Labour party's latest document, entitled "Looking to the Future", in particular, a section entitled "Good homes for all", is a hotch-potch of Conservative policies that they can no longer avoid adopting, such as the right to buy. It is a summary of their old and failed methods of spending more public money, particularly through letting council spending rip and killing off what remains of the private sector.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): Does the hon. Gentleman agree or disagree that the sale of council houses that has been forced on local authorities, plus the denial of the right of those authorities to build houses, have contributed to the large number of youngsters in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and the large number of homeless families? Many people cannot afford to take out a mortgage, particularly at present interest rates, yet the local authority, because it has been forced to sell many of its council houses, has nothing to offer them.

Mr. Martin: The hon. Lady should read her own party document "Looking to the Future", where she will see that the right to buy is supported.

I should like to apply precisely the same solutions that have sorted out other vital aspects for ordinary people, both rich and poor. We must face up to that if we are to sort out the problems. Of course I welcome the energy of my hon. Friend—soon to be right hon, I hope—the Minister for Housing and Planning. No one understands or sympathises more than he, but, until we apply to the provision of homes the solutions that supply other staple human needs so efficiently, we shall not comprehensively tackle homelessness. We shall see people, families in particular, in bedsits for ever, without the proper accommodation that we should provide.

Rent legislation should not apply to future lettings—forget past lettings. To many, that sounds as politically impossible as the privatisation of public utilities or effective legislation to tackle abuses of union power. The latter, incidentally, has emancipated many families not only from being caught up in the turmoil and bitterness of frequent strikes but from the lights suddenly going out, the heating going off, the trains suddenly stopping, the dead lying unburied, and the hospitals not accepting those who are ill. All those nightmares culminated in the infamous Labour winter of despair of 1978-79, which led to many years of Conservative Government.

I note the excellent work that is done by our housing associations to help single people as well as families. People in Portsmouth are no exception. The concept of a mix of public and private money and expertise is sound and is standing the test of time. I welcome the recent initiative by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning in urging upon housing associations an enabling role to bring privately owned property, estimated at a staggering 600,000 empty properties—that shows the lack of confidence that has been built up over many years of hammering the supply of rented properties—into the rented market by offering managed short-term leasing for the owner with guaranteed vacant possession at the end of the lease.

That is the way in which local authorities must act. I have been pressing it on my own local authority and other local authorities for as long as I can remember. To create confidence, we must find the homes, tell the owners that they may have their homes back at the end of a particular period, and they will let to people on the housing list in the meantime. That will make houses available, because people will have confidence that they will get their homes back.

We owe it to our constituents and to families all over the country to get to grips with remaining housing problems. The more boldly we act in this sphere—it is the agenda for the 1990s—the greater will be their reward.

The theme that runs through all the matters that I have raised is the principle that Government policy must complement, not replace, family and individual responsibility. It must encourage, not displace, the host of voluntary and charitable organisations to which so many citizens contribute. Of course, without the right economic policies, all the compassion in the world cannot be

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translated into sufficient effective help. The good Samaritan had to meet the innkeeper's bill, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) said in his inimitable style not long ago.

All the objectives that I have set out in my motion will be most effectively tackled by policies that encourage the creation of wealth in a strong, market-based economy, rather than the collectivist obsessions of past Labour Governments or any future one. We know from experience that such Governments, however well intentioned—I give every credit to the intentions of Labour Governments—contract the habit usually after one or two years of living beyond their means, and then beyond ours.

According to its latest document "Looking to the Future", the new model Labour party's policies, with their massive spending commitments, differ only in degree from the policies that led to the party's defeat in the 1987 general election, let alone those in the fiasco of that longest suicide note in history, as it was described by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), upon which the Labour party fought the 1983 general election. When I consider those policies and the policies in the new document, I wonder how many Opposition Members are truly reconstructed in the party's apparently new red rose image and how many, desperate for another Labour Government, are keeping quiet and swallowing any revisionism necessary.

When I was reading—I was determined to do so, even if it killed me—"Looking to the Future", to which I have referred many times, I considered what its authors were up to. I was helped by recollection of an old recipe from a Saxon medicine book:

> "If sheep be ailing, take a little new ale and pour it into the mouth of each sheep, and manage to make them swallow it, quickish; that will prove of benefit to them."

I thought that that was exactly what the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Cabinet were probably up to with their Back Benchers.

But the problem is that the document did not say how long the medicine's beneficial effects would last. It is certainly difficult to contemplate the electorate trusting the future to a party which has opposed most measures of the past decade. Those measures sought to strengthen family independence rather than state provision, provide choice rather than uniformity, overhaul benefits, establish the right to buy, reform education and the health service and build savings, rather than attack them. Under Labour, power would once again be taken from the home and the parents and would be given to the state, including to a patronising and bureaucratic Ministry for Women.

The Conservative party recognises what is required and has the necessary courage to achieve it. In my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister we have a winner. Opposition Members know it, and we know it. He has a Government around him of Ministers who are also winners. We must, and I am sure we will, continue to develop policies best designed to nurture and help families along the lines of my motion.

4.12 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Having told us that he did not intend to be a surrogate bishop this afternoon, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) decided to give us the reinterpretation that we have heard before of one of the most famous gospel stories. He told us that the real moral of the story of the good Samaritan was that we had to have some money in our pockets in the first place. Of course, the true moral of the story is that one must show unconditional love, care and respect for the person who has fallen on the other side of the road and is vulnerable, weak and in need of help. Herein lies the chasm which divides some Members.

We all welcome this debate on families. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South placed great emphasis on choice. For me that is a modern heresy. The idea that it is one's right to do whatever one wants at anyone else's expense is expressed again and again. We hear little about responsibility. I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to provide more accommodation for people who wish to exercise the right to buy or, indeed, to allow the right to buy in the private sector, where many properties have lain empty for many years on end.

When I was chairman of the housing committee in Liverpool in 1978, we introduced policies to give people the chance to buy empty properties in the public sector and I was generally in favour of that proposal in the Government's legislation, but that alone is not enough. For the past decade I have been a trustee of the charity Crisis, which is the largest charity dealing with homelessness in this country. It was previously known as Crisis at Christmas. During that decade all hon. Members have been shamed as the numbers of homeless people have increased inexorably—we have all seen the people in cardboard city or the pictures of the homeless on our television sets. Anyone who walks around any major metropolis will see homeless people, many of them young, sleeping rough on the streets at night. That is where the parable of the good Samaritan is applicable. Surely it is not merely about the money to buy one's own home. In addition—it is not mutally exclusive—we need a willingness to reach out to the person whom no one else will care for or speak for.

The debate is timely because each party, in its own way, has been building a family policy and honing the issues before a general election. Although the received political wisdom is that elections are won or lost on economic issues, increasingly—the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South was right about this—public apprehension about the disintegration of social cohesion in Britain has forced each party to set out its stall on family policy.

Curiously, in contrast with much of the emphasis placed by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, all the parties seem to come to the same conclusion—that family life will somehow be strengthened by making divorce even easier. The motion states that the family should be

> "the basis for a stable, responsible . . . society".

That is not possible if marriage is no longer to be regarded as a lifelong commitment. The statistics show that marriage is increasingly regarded as temporary and that children become the casualties. Marriage breakdown is 600 per cent. higher than it was in 1961 and involves more than 150,000 couples each year. One in three marriages now ends in divorce and we are fast approaching the American norm where 50 per cent. of all marriages break up. In this country, 3 million people will experience a broken marriage during this decade and 150,000 children under 16 are caught up in divorce every year. One in five British children can expect to experience their parents' divorce before they reach the age of 16.

In its document, "Family Change and Future Policy" the Family Policies Study Centre predicts that, by the year 2000, only one out of every two children will grow up in what it describes as a conventional family. The number of single parents abandoned and left to shoulder all the responsibility for rearing a child has risen inexorably, with one in 10 children in single parent families in 1979, compared with one in four now.

Not everyone decides to marry or to live in a family, but at some time in most people's lives the family provides love, companionship and security. When family life breaks down the community should do all in its power to protect and care for the casualties. I am well aware, as is probably every other hon. Member, of the bitter sequels to family breakdown—the bitterness and recriminations which have far-reaching and catastrophic effects on estranged partners and children alike. Rarely does a week go by without constituents consulting me about maintenance payments which have not been honoured, access arrangements which have broken down and legal battles which sometimes go on for years.

A few weeks ago I met a woman who told me how her husband had walked out on her when she was four months pregnant. He has never bothered to show the slightest interest in his six-months-old daughter, although he wants access to his 12-year-old son, who does not want to see his father. She contested his attempt to divorce, but was told by a court official in the Liverpool Crown court that her attempts to fight for her marriage represented attitudes from "the dark ages". Subsequently, she was rebuked by a judge who told her that her feelings did not "enter into it".

I took up that case with the Lord Chancellor's Office and was told it was a matter entirely for the local courts. Surely that is an example of how far the pendulum has swung away from the safeguarding of marriage and the family as our most basic community.

Many argue that families are irrelevant in modern society and that marriage should not be regarded as a permanent institution. A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research—the Labour party's source of new ideas—argues that two years is too long for couples to wait for a fault-free divorce. The institute also argues for more publicly funded child care rather than tax relief, to help parents who prefer to stay at home. The same view is held by many Conservative Members and within my own party. Instead of making it earlier to divorce, policy should concentrate on strengthening family life and on making it easier for families to stay together.

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): Although there are no statistics, a large number of women are trapped in their homes with violent partners and cannot leave because they have nowhere else to go. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on women who are forced to live in a violent situation of that kind?

Mr. Alton: I will comment later on violence—and on pornography, which I believe helps to fuel it. I accept that the cases that the hon. Lady mentions are among the most painful of all. They should not be considered from a judgmental point of view. Instead, we must do all that we can to help the single parent to cease being an isolated element in society and to be a fully integrated part of the community, enjoying all the support that we can give. It is not a question of simply apportioning blame when acknowledging that families sometimes break up.

Even in cases where families want to stay together, often courts and court officials tend to shift the emphasis in the direction of favouring divorce which accounts for the massive increase in marriage breakdowns. People too often view the institution of marriage as a temporary commitment into which they can enter on a trial and error basis.

The Government can help the pendulum to swing back in the other direction in a number of ways. I should like every Government Department to produce an assessment of the effects of its policies on family life. If such an indicator and impact statement were built into every Government policy, that would be one way of entrenching the family. Also, taxation should not penalise marriage but ought to recognise the work of the spouse who undertakes the rearing of the children. Tax legislation ought to take into account the real costs of family life—particularly of caring for children. The state should encourage and enable family life, but—and in this I agree with the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South—it should never attempt to substitute for it.

In the case of the elderly, for example, Government policy could take account of changing demographic patterns. The hon. Gentleman mentioned grandparents. One in four of the population of the city that I represent are over retirement age. The fastest-growing group are the over-80s. Families ought to be given improvement grants for the purpose of providing granny flats, so that aged relatives can be accommodated in the family home, if they wish.

In many areas—including my own—planners have been the culprits in destroying the community and family life. Aged people are left in isolated tenements while their former home and the community are ripped apart, with their former residents being shanghaied to places miles away, often to be left in the most dehumanising conditions. Young families are often separated from their grandparents who, in former times, might have been able to give support and help.

The child should, from the moment of its conception, be at the centre of a family-based policy. Its life and its integrity must be protected. Once a child is born, it should, wherever possible, be provided for by both parents. When a parent walks out on his or her child, there should be an automatic attachment of earnings, so that the child can be properly cared for and supported. Children deserve a world that can offer them the best chance for development. Their good is the responsibility of parents and of the wider community.

A glimpse of the statistics shows how much we are failing our country's children. Last year, 184,000 unborn children had their lives ended in the womb and only four out of five pregnancies now go full term. Child abuse continues after birth. Barely a day passes without a new report about attacks on children. Child protection registers were established in 1974, but it was not until 1989 that the information they contained was first published. It revealed that 40,700 children were registered and that 41 per cent. were the cause of grave concern, as being at significant risk of abuse. Also, 4·8 per cent. of those children had been subjected to emotional ill-treatment or rejection; 14 per cent. had been sexually abused, 23 per cent. physically injured, and 12 per cent. persistently neglected, while 3 per cent. fell into a mixture of those categories. Such violence often stems from the spurious libertarian argument about choice that says, "It is my right

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to do whatever I want—even to take another person's life—because it is my right to choose." That is a form of modern heresy.

The free distribution of pornography is also defended on the grounds of choice. Pornography degrades families and homes throughout a country where it is so easily accessible. No hon. Member could be unaware of the effects and linkage that exist between the free availability of pornography, and violence against women and children. Despite the recent reports submitted to the Home Office claiming that there is no link, I am convinced that such links exist.

Our lack of concern for the young and the environment in which they are reared is reflected in many ways, for example in the number of runaways. The Children's Society estimates that last year 98,000 children ran away from their homes, but we do not even keep a national computerised register. I hope that the Minister will touch on that issue when she replies. The society estimates that 150,000 young people aged 16 to 19 are homeless each year—often lured away into a life of drugs and prostitution on the streets of London. It is estimated that 100,000 young people take drugs. In addition, alcohol abuse and gambling by young people in amusement arcades deeply corrode family life.

Poverty is another corrosive influence and I was sorry that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South did not say more about the issue. In 1989, the Child Poverty Action Group highlighted 20 examples of the underside of life in Britain. More than 15 million people in the mid-1980s were defined as living in poverty or on its margins, with more than 2 million children living in families with poverty. While tax allowances have increased, the value of child benefits has fallen since 1979. The value of tax allowance has gone up by 22 per cent. for married men and 19 per cent. for single people, but the value of child benefit has gone down by 12 per cent.

Babies with fathers in unskilled jobs run twice the risk of still birth and death under one year old of that faced by babies of professional fathers. Although two families in every three own their own home, homelessness is on the increase and has doubled in the past decade, with 30,000 homeless families sleeping in hostels. In 1989, a total of 70,480 households were in mortgage arrears for six months or more. If poverty, drugs, pornography, homelessness, abortion and divorce are corrosive of family life, so too is consumerism.

Last week in answer to questions that I tabled in the House, the Economic Secretary confirmed that, this year, 3 per cent. of all households—560,000—have serious debts. At the end of the third quarter of 1990, consumer debt stood at £49·6 billion. When broken down into categories, consumer debt is divided up as follows: bank credit cards, which have multiplied massively in the past decade, account for £7·6 billion; retail accounts amount to £2·3 billion; bank loans on personal accounts account for £17 billion; finance houses and other specialist credit granters, which are often loan sharks, account for £20 billion. That places massive pressure on families and we should not underestimate the effect on them. Where is our nation of savers? We have become a nation that is in pawn and in debt, with many families being hit by debts that they cannot meet. Some 560,000 households are in serious debt. Last year, 23,000 households had their gas supplies cut off and 73,000 households had their electricity supplies cut off, 13,780 homes were repossessed and there were 70,000 households in mortgage arrears of six months or more.

A genuine family policy would have the child and related considerations at the heart of its approach. It must be balanced when addressing all forms of pressure, economic and social.

The family can be a school of more abundant humanity. It can be the community's basic building block. It is uniquely suited to teach and to transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values. The House should therefore do everything possible to protect it and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South for giving us the chance to debate such a crucially important question.

4.29 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on winning the ballot. This subject touches many of us, and I agree with much of what he said.

The family is perhaps the most enduring institution known to mankind. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) observed, it is a basic building block for society itself. Without the family, society would be impossibly atomised, and relationships transient and unsatisfactory.

Like almost all institutions, the family has undergone rapid change over the past 25 years. The statistics for illegitimacy, divorce, cohabitation and abortion certainly bear witness to the pace of that change. It is almost conventional wisdom nowadays to speak of the family as if it were an anachronism: it seems to be fashionable to talk of a tidal wave of divorce and cohabitation sweeping away what left-wing intellectuals derisively call the traditional family.

Media pundits often claim that the family is really an institution of the past, and that the 21st century will see its demise. I believe, however, that the resilience of the family structure is probably greatly underestimated. During the second world war, for instance, many families were broken up as service men and women were lost in battle and civilians were killed, but the family remained as strong as ever in the 1950s. Ask school children whether they want to marry and have children, and the overwhelming majority will say yes. Most people spend most of their lives in a household headed by a married couple, most people believe adultery to be very wrong, and the great majority believe that children are best reared by both their natural parents.

It is not so much that traditional values have collapsed, for they patently have not. Most people continue to aspire to a basically traditional lifestyle involving marriage and the raising of children within that union. The problem is that we are increasingly finding it hard to live up to that ideal—in large part because we have far higher expectations of the degree of happiness that marriage will secure, and, conversely, because we are far less tolerant of unhappiness and disappointment.

What is indisputably clear is that marriage remains overwhelmingly popular, because individuals find that it works. For all the well-chronicled problems and

unhappiness that can exist within human relationships, we would do well to remember that most people find the greatest happiness and fulfilment within marriage.

I believe that there is a great deal of agreement across the political spectrum about the importance of the family; yet there is no consensus about how policy-makers should try to support the family. An area of particular disagreement is the role of the mother. One of the most worrying developments that I have witnessed in the past decade or so is the devaluation of the status of women who choose to stay at home to bring up their children. Increasingly, it seems that an individual's identity is determined by his or her job, rather than by the role that he or she plays in society.

The housewife's role, rather than being scorned as unfulfilled or untested, should be recognised for the important position that it is. What more valuable job could one do than to mould a future generation? I spent 15 years as an unpaid housewife and mother raising three children before, in middle age, taking up a new career in politics. I become irritated when I hear politicians and business men telling women why, for a thousand and one reasons, from demography to self-fulfilment, they should go out to work.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I am closely following the hon. Lady's argument and I understand her points. Does she agree that over the last decade many women in the United Kingdom have been forced to work because of changing family and financial circumstances? They usually have to take low-paid unskilled work, so it is not a matter of career prospects. They would much rather work in a fulfilled atmosphere at home, but necessity drives them to the market place where they have to find work in order to make ends meet. We need to enhance the role of women in society. Necessity should not interfere in the family by forcing women to work.

Mrs. Roe: Not all women return to work because of financial necessity. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill drew our attention to the high divorce rate. Many women feel that they have to return to work early because they fear that in middle age they may well find themselves divorced and with no career structure to which to return. Many young women are returning to the workplace in order to create a base for themselves in the unhappy event of divorce. I assure the House that the woman who stays at home looking after her family works just as hard running her home as she would running a business outside.

It is not the Government's role to encourage or discourage women from taking paid employment. Today married women certainly have far greater freedom of choice than ever before about whether to have a career outside the home. Opportunities through education, which their mothers or grandmothers never had, are now available to them. The Government should not campaign to get mothers into the workplace. Mothers should decide for themselves about whether to do that.

I would not wish to see British women subjected to the social and cultural tyranny which, for example, exists in Sweden where women who choose to stay at home to bring up children are derided as inadequate failures. As my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South has said, choice is the key factor. Whether and how much a mother works outside the home is an intensely personal decision for wives and, of course, for their husbands.

Increasingly, women are deciding to work outside the home. In 1931, only 10 per cent. of married women were employed, while in 1987 the figure had risen to 60 per cent. It should be noted that most of that increase was due to the increase in part-time work. I suspect that it is despite the direction of Government or zealous feminists that women are managing to combine work with having a family.

By 1987, more than half of married couples with children consisted of two working partners. As the age of the youngest child rises, the number of mothers who choose to re-enter the work force rises as well. Among families in which the youngest child is under two years of age, 70 per cent. of mothers do not work outside the home. Among families in which the youngest child is over 10 years, the figure falls to 26 per cent.

We have begun to see a substantial rise in job sharing, part-time work, at-home work and flexitime, as a result of which working mothers can choose the hours that they work. Certainly, demographic and social changes have made it easier for women to enter the work force. As fewer and fewer teenagers are available, more and more companies will seek out mothers to fill vital positions. Firms that want to recruit and train mothers will increasingly have to offer attractive child care facilities and opportunities for part-time work. I see no reason why women should not be able to combine work and family.

I have no time for grandiose state-sponsored schemes to get women back to work—schemes operating through taxation or through the benefits system. Such schemes would only redistribute income from the poor to the affluent. By and large, two-earner households are wealthier than single-earner households where the mother stays at home to look after the children. What good could possibly be done by a regressive redistribution of income from the needy to the affluent? We must be careful to ensure that Government intervention does not distort. No Government should try to deny mothers the option to stay at home, yet that would be the effect of offering tax hand-outs or benefits to people who put their children into nurseries or creches. Encouraging one form of behaviour discourages or penalises another.

Today, couples have much higher expectations of marriage. One of the prime factors motivating women to work is the extra income, as well as the self-esteem, that it can bring. People want more for themselves and more for their children: a stable home, a car and holidays. Surely there is nothing wrong in looking for a better quality of life. That, quite simply, is a natural human impulse. Between 1979 and 1985, real household income rose by 8·8 per cent. overall. All family groups saw increases in real income, and couples with children saw their real income rise by 9 per cent.

But with higher expectations come also greater opportunities to fail. As the hon. Member for Mossley Hill has outlined, divorce is now much more prevalent. In 1951 2·6 marriages in 1,000 ended in divorce; by 1987, the rate had risen to 12·7 per 1,000. However, while the divorce rate doubled during the 1970s, it appears that it remained fairly level throughout the 1980s.

Over the last few decades we have seen many changes in the structure of the family. Some trends, such as the rise in illegitimacy, are very worrying, while others, such as the rise in living standards that most families have enjoyed, are very encouraging. What is clear is that the family will continue to endure and adapt. I suggest that, at least in part, the chance of it doing so successfully will depend on

[Mrs. Roe]

the Government ensuring that the woman who chooses to stay at home is not disadvantaged or pressurised in any way. As a housewife, she should not be made to feel that she is at the bottom of the career ladder. She should be provided with opportunities to retrain or to learn new skills if or when she wishes to resume paid employment as her children grow older.

4.44 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on having chosen this subject for debate. I think that I am right in saying that the previous time we debated anything connected with children and the family was the occasion on which I chose the subject for a motion. My only reason for mentioning that—and it may turn out to be the only point of agreement between the hon. Gentleman and myself—is that only when individual Members take the initiative does the House take seriously, or bother to discuss, the subject. Yet a large proportion of the population is involved, and whatever action is taken will determine to a very large extent the sort of adults that children will become.

The hon. Gentleman, despite the best will in the world, is rather ill-informed about what is actually happening to children and to family life in this country. It is very easy to say, as he said, that people ought to look forward rather than backward, that these are policies for the future. Some of the problems facing many children today have been mentioned, and I shall talk about others later. Those problems have arisen because of the policies that the Government have enacted during the past 11 years.

I asked a question about housing, and the hon. Gentleman replied that the Labour party believes in the right to buy. That is not the point that I was making. We have never said that people should not have the right to buy; what we have said—this is the point that I was making—is that if local authorities, irrespective of the housing situation in their areas, are told that they must allow people to buy their council houses and, at the same time, are deprived of the ability to replace those houses, a housing problem will arise. Obviously, there will always be people who cannot afford to buy houses. Why are so many local authorities, such as the one in my area, under enormous pressure to rehouse families? Why do we not have accommodation for them? The reason is that the best houses have been sold, and Government policy dictates that we cannot replace those that have been lost. That is why we are in this vicious circle. It is also why the number of children in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and the number of children who have run away have increased, and why a host of other calamities have arisen. Thus there is a direct connection with Government policy.

In that regard, I agree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). Indeed, his remarks made me think that he had probably read some of the policy documents that I, in my capacity as Labour party spokesperson on children, have written. I agree entirely that, before introducing legislation, any Government ought to look at the effects it will have on children. That is very rarely done. Indeed, in this respect, the last Labour Government were guilty. Had such effects been taken into account, we should not have built high-rise flats in the 1950s. We should not have expected kids to thrive and flourish in such homes, and we should not have expected women not to be bored and miserable and to become dependent on Valium because there was no escape for them.

No, we do not relate our policies to the needs of children. I could talk about this in the context of transport and a host of other things, but I do not have time to do so. I repeat that when we are passing legislation it is important that we consider its effects on children—its effects now, in 10 years' time and in 20 years' time.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, by way of giving evidence that the Conservative Government have done a great deal for children, highlighted the Children Act 1989. I was a member of the Standing Committee that considered that Act. The hon. Gentleman—indeed, the whole House—will know that one of the reasons for our having achieved legislation in the shape of the Children Act arose from the Cleveland report's appalling disclosures of child abuse, which came as a shock to many hon. Members. Indeed, there are very few people who were not appalled by those disclosures. The Government were right to wait for the publication of that report before introducing legislation. In that way they were able to provide greater protection for children. I was happy to support the legislation.

However, there is no money to implement the provisions of the Act. We have heard about the large number of children on at-risk registers who are not attached to any social worker. In the light of what we know about child abuse in this country, that is absolutely disgraceful. Indeed, it is unbelievable and inexcusable. The purpose of the Children Act was to protect children, yet in London and all other large cities there are increasing numbers of children on at-risk registers. That is not because people are treating their children worse; it is because we are beginning to find out how badly people have always treated their children. Of course, it is a minority who abuse children, but people are disclosing abuse, children are coming forward and social workers are trained to recognise the signs. This is all useful and desirable, but we need the money to implement the legislation.

The local authority in my area has said that employing the extra staff needed to do that job would cost £400,000 or £500,000 a year. That local authority, like all others, has to consider its poll tax bill. It is ridulous that, in order to ensure that we are not poll tax capped, we have to cut services that are needed to avoid damage to children and to the fabric of society. I urge Conservative Members in particular, who put themselves forward as members of the party of the family, to look at what the Government have done to families. They should not say, "I am not concerned about the past, let us look to the future", because we are picking up the pieces of the past for the minority—sadly an increasing one—of our children who face appalling problems.

The Government frequently hide their inactivity behind a mask of ignorance. The figures about the number of children who go missing have rightly been read out. There are about 98,000 on the books of the Children's Society, but the Government say that they do not collect those figures nationally. I have asked about the number of children in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, but the Government do not have figures on that. I have been referred to some other agency. I have asked about the

number of children who play truant and about the number who work illegally—some for pocket money, but some because their parents are unemployed and they have to be a contributory factor in breadwinning for the family—and the Government do not have the figures.

When the Government enact their policy, they should know about all these problems and about why they exist. No party can claim to be the party of the family when it knows so little about children and family life. We know that 2 million or more children are living in poverty and of the increase in the number of reported cases of child abuse and of violence within families. I do not know whether the incidence of such crimes has gone up, but I know that there are many more reported cases. We should be devising policies and making it easier for women and children who experience violence to be offered the means of escape.

This is where I part company with those who hold up their hands in horror over the divorce rate. One has to take into account why people get divorced. People do not opt for divorce lightly, but many have taken advantage of easier divorce laws to get out of a situation that they can stand no longer. They know that they can escape from such situations. One should not say that divorce is wrong, or should be discouraged, or that people should stay together for the sake of the children. Ask the adults whose parents stayed together in an atmosphere of violence and misery for the sake of the children that they then were, and see what they say.

Mr. Burns: Does the hon. Lady accept that, in many cases, it is more harmful to the children if parents stay together rather than seeking divorce? Divorce is not an easy option.

Miss Lestor: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Our society lacks the proper structure to deal with divorces, with children of divorces once separation has taken place, and with the changing pattern of family life in which both parents remarry and have children in the new relationships. Few organisations help children and other families to relate to that and to organise their lives. I do not believe that the family has collapsed or is disappearing. It has fundamentally changed and will continue to change. We have to devise structures and ways to help people, particularly children, to cope with those changes, and to take away the guilt associated with the break-up of marriage.

Within our definition of families, we should have more than the narrow concept of mother and father and Janet and John in a two or three-bedroomed house with a dog. A family is what the children perceive it to be. It can be a one-parent family with all the love and care of a two-parent family. It can be a grandmother who cares for the children because things have gone wrong. We do children who are not in the accepted pattern of family life but are in offshoots of it a disservice to present to them the ideal of the family to which many hon. Members feel we should aspire. Many children never can and never will have such a family life, but they should not be deprived of family support or of what is available to families.

Mr. Alton: I agree with some of what the hon. Lady is saying and I do not elevate the idea of the nuclear family to an ideal because things can go badly wrong. However, does she accept that, all other things being equal, the best interests of the child are served where there can be two parents in a stable relationship that does not change? When a child loses one or other of its parents, for whatever reason, it may suffer enormous emotional trauma.

Miss Lestor: The hon. Gentleman and I agree on many points. He is saying that if a family is loving, that is the best thing for the child. That is true, if people are prepared to work at it and if their irritations, antagonisms and personalities are such that they can work at it. However, that is not the case for a growing minority of our children. My plea is only that we take these people with us when we present our ideas about what is desirable and preferable in family life.

The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) said that women who stay at home to look after their children are made to feel guilty. I do not agree with that. It is up to people to make a choice. The trouble is that many women do not have that choice. Many are forced to go out to work, for a wide variety of reasons. One of the worst suggestions that the Government made, which seems to have got lost somewhere, is that if a woman refuses to name the father of her child, for whatever reason, she should be penalised by the loss of 20 per cent. of her income support. There may be good reasons why a woman makes such a refusal, but, even if the Government feel that they must take punitive measures, why must they take it out on the kids? That is what they are doing. They are saying, "Right, we are not giving you much anyway, but if you won't tell us who the scoundrel who fathered your child is, we shall take 20 per cent. from your income support and push you deeper into poverty."

Women's rights are tied up with their right to work, or not to work, as they choose. It is up to people to decide how they run their lives. The terrible dilemma for many one-parent families is that the cost of child care is so great that women in such a situation would have to earn between £50 and £70 a week more than most women to pay for the child care that enables them to work. Furthermore, by working they lose many of the benefits that they would otherwise have. If we believe in freedom for people to please themselves, and for women in such a situation to please themselves, the Government should look closely at child care arrangements, which represent one of the biggest barriers to work for many single women. If they want to stay at home looking after their children, it should be made easier for them to do so. Sometimes, social security offices do not make it easy for mothers to stay at home to look after their children when that is what they would like to do.

As the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South said, child care is a complex issue. Nursery education has always been free—the problem is that there has never been much of it. If one is lucky enough to live in the area of a local authority that offers nursery education—most likely Labour—one can send one's child there. Mostly, it would be part-time provision. Apart from that facility, there is a variety of other child care, most of which is expensive and some of which is for only a few hours a day, which does not help the working mother. It can be a workplace nursery. For the good of family life and of children, mothers and fathers, whatever child care policies are developed, we should be talking about child care facilities for all children, not just for those of working mothers. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) will say more about this later. Whatever the cost of child care facilities, if they are available only for working

[Miss Lestor]

mothers, whenever a Government decide that such women are not needed in the work force any longer, they will stop them.

In whatever form it comes, child care is an essential part of bringing up children. After they are two or three, because of their essential curiosity, most children want more than can be provided in the best of homes. At that age, they learn more than at any other time in their lives and as most of us cannot provide enough stimulus in our homes, we look to outside agencies. My plea is, as it always has been, that such a facility should be available for all our children. If we are to have priorities and to move step by step, we must ensure that poverty does not deny children access to such facilities while we allow those with money access to better facilities.

An example has been provided by Warwickshire county council, which has recently decided to close its nursery schools—as they come under the Department of Education and Science, children can attend them free of charge—and then to let them out on a commercial basis. That means that the poorer people in the area for which the county council is responsible will not be able to afford the nursery education that was available to their children free of charge, and there is much poverty within the area. If we push private provision too far, many children will be unable to participate in pre-school activity because it will be far too expensive for their parents.

Many of the Government policies and many of the attitudes that have been developed have contributed to a denial of access to nursery education for many children. I believe that this will contribute to a breakdown in family life, which the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South claims that the Government have enhanced. The freezing of child benefit, the removal of income support for 16 to 20-year-olds, the introduction of poll tax, the shortage of housing and a host of other things have all been contributory factors in breaking down family life. Life has been made harder for families.

I was appalled to receive a letter from a woman who had taken on her murdered sister's two children. She had taken them into her home alongside her own two children. No money is involved. The children are not in the care of the local authority. As she is hard up—the family is not rich—she applied to the Department of Social Security for the extra £1 for that group of siblings as well as for her own. She argued, "I have taken on another family and there are two first-born children." The Department said, "You cannot have the money. You can have it only for one, because you are a unit. You can apply only in respect of the older child in the situation in which you find yourself." I could not believe it. Equally, I could not believe the letter I received from the Department. I was confident when I wrote that it would accept that a mistake had been made. After all, what is £1?

That sort of application of a rigid rule undermines what we understand by family life. It undermines also what the woman is doing in bringing up the children of her murdered sister.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South talked about what he would like to see in future. We would not need to have so many dreams, hopes and ideas about and for the future if the past 11 years had not been so bad for our children. Things have become worse for a minority of our children. For a growing minority of our children, things continue to become worse. Until the Government grasp that nettle and understand what family poverty is, what child abuse is and how some families depend on child benefit and the uprating of it, we shall face year in and year out the problems that we are discussing. At the same time, more of our children and more families will suffer.

5.3 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): There have been some wide-ranging and thoughtful contributions to an intersting debate. I do not propose to add to the wide-ranging nature of it. Instead, I shall concentrate on one narrow issue about which I feel strongly, and on which I know that I am right, and that is the remarriage of widows.

I shall spell out the background. As people become healthier and live longer, and as their old age is healthier, it is possible for more and more people to contemplate remarriage later in their lives. My mother remarried at 74, and the last five years of her life were as happy as any other part of it. I shall concentrate on widows because the longevity of women is greater than that of men, and pension schemes are normally based on male contributions rather than those made by females. Increasingly, widows are in receipt of pensions because of the contributions that their first husbands made at their places of work. Those pensions will cease, however, if the widows remarry. Some of these pensions are quite generous.

I represent a considerable number of service men and their families including many service widows who are living on naval pensions. If one of those widows wants to remarry, she has to face the agonising choice of remarrying and forfeiting the pension—it would fall on remarriage—or remaining alone when it might be her inclination, and that of the man she has met, to remarry. It is an agonising choice and it should not have to be faced by anyone.

In many instances the widow will decide that she wishes to remarry. Her second husband—I am talking mainly of elderly people—will probably be already retired. If that is the position, the women will have no pension rights associated with her second husband. It will be a post-service marriage. If she should be widowed again, for a second time, she will be left without the first pension that she received by virtue of her first husband's service. She will have no pension by virtue of her second husband's service because it was a post-service marriage. People should not be placed in that position.

I have spent years trying to explain to Ministers that there is a real problem. Unfortunately, I am getting nowhere. I have been told consistently that if a woman decides to remarry it is only right that she should cast her lot in with her second husband and look to him for a pension arrangement. As I have said, that is impossible if the second husband has already retired and it is a post-service marriage.

I shall deal specifically with examples that concern the Ministry of Defence because many of my constituents are service personnel, but my argument can be applied generally throughout the public and private sectors. I greatly welcome the introduction by the Ministry of Defence of a discretionary right. The widow who marries a second time can ask for her pension from her first husband to be reinstated. The rule is that if she is significantly worse off as a result of the second marriage and losing the first pension, the Ministry, in its wisdom,

will contemplate and grant a pension that goes back to the one that was paid to the widow by virtue of her first husband's service.

I ask hon. Members to put themselves in the position of a widow who is contemplating remarriage who does not know whether she will have her first pension restored as of right. Discretionary restoration is not good enough. No sensible woman with a significant pension that enables her to live in some comfort in retirement will cast that pension aside with only the hope that the pension fund trustees will restore her first husband's pension if she should be left a widow for a second time.

A most respectable elderly couple who are known to me —I hasten to say that they are not constituents of mine —went away for a weekend and returned to tell their friends that they had married in their absence. They told me privately that they had done nothing of the sort. If they had remarried, the woman would have lost her first pension and would, perhaps, have been left without a pension on second widowhood. As I have said, this is a serious problem.

Unlike many of the other submissions that are made to the Treasury and rejected by it, I am delighted that what I am suggesting would not cost anything. I know that there are a significant number of widows who would like to remarry but who cannot do so. As a result, their pension from their first husband continues. If we were to introduce a rule that had the effect that if a widow remarried and was left a widow for a second time her pension from the first marriage would be restored automatically, more widows would enter second marriages. Socially that would be desirable. It is my own family experience that it would make for a great deal of happiness in the community, and it would not cost anything. We would be suspending the first pension only during the second marriage. If a widow were not left a widow for a second time, nothing would happen. If she were to find herself in that position, the first pension would be restored.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My hon. Friend makes an important point that applies to a significant number of people. Perhaps we should ask the Ministry of Defence how many letters from Members of Parliament it has answered. Two leading members of my association are in this position. I suspect that the Ministry of Defence may have been dealing with this in an atomistic way. Perhaps we should combine.

Mr. Viggers: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. David Martin: Join the club.

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend asks me to join. Perhaps we should table a joint parliamentary question.

I am not picking out the Ministry of Defence as a bad employer, but my experience is based on it and on service personnel. I am considering public and private sector pension schemes generally.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to consider this issue carefully; it is of great importance to a few people. The change that I have suggested would be the best one. Others say that changes should be made to the pension arrangements of the second husband and that his pension scheme should bear the burden of the post-service marriage. For technical reasons, I do not think that that is as good as the right to restoration of the first pension. I am grateful for the opportunity to make that small point.

5.10 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on securing this debate. Since coming to the House nearly four years ago, he and I have tried to maintain as reasonable a working relationship as possible, bearing in mind our views on politics. I give a genuine welcome to the debate and to the issues that he has raised.

The debate is a bit of a pot-pourri on the issues of the family. I am the youngest grandfather in the House; I have two grandchildren. I believe in marriage as an institution, as I have now tried it twice. There is no such thing as an easy divorce. We must try, not only in legal but emotional terms, to provide resources to enable families to remain together or, if that is not possible, to disengage in such a way that it damages neither the partners nor, more important, the children. That disengagement is more traumatic for children than the final outcome of a divorce and separation, and that trauma can remain with the children for many years and affect many aspects of their lives.

We should discuss this matter not in a pious way but by recognising that every statistic is a human being in a complex relationship. Our constituents come to see us about the housing, economic and social consequences of the breakdown of marriage.

An on-going problem for women is violence in the home, which leads them to seek refuge in order to protect themselves and their children. When women cannot find refuge, they remain in marriage and in those violent circumstances. Insufficient resources are made available for local authorities to provide refuges for women who are suffering from violence. In many parts of the United Kingdom this evening, women will suffer, not for the first time, from the violence of a partner but will be unable to take themselves to a place of refuge either because none exists or because the police are unwilling to take action.

The problems that we are discussing are complex, and we shall be unable to resolve them by 7 pm. If we are committed to the concept of the family, its role must be maintained and developed. For the majority of people, there must be genuine choice in employment, training, health care, housing, personal social services and pensions. Access to those services must be consistent with the needs of the family either as a group or individually. I want to concentrate not on the generality of family policies but on the suffering of families because of a breakdown in personal relationships, which affects the behaviour of children.

By the time that this House adjourns on Friday afternoon, two mothers in Britain will have lost a child because of solvent abuse. Solvent abuse knows no social barriers. It can affect a family who are well off, on middle income, on benefit or who have no social problems. It is a growing problem. Resolve is a national charity that works with the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Health and the Home Office to establish the nature of solvent abuse and to introduce measures to protect individuals. Between June and December 1990, there were 725 reports of solvent abuse. There were 230 reported deaths of young people because of solvent abuse, and a further 215 were involved in criminal activities because of it.

The hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) has campaigned long and vigorously on the issue of solvent

[Mr. Ian McCartney]

abuse, which has led to changes in the law and to growing recognition by the Home Office of the need for special measures to take care of those involved in solvent abuse. Despite those changes in the law, an escalating number of children are becoming involved for a short or a longer period. It can make someone a chronic abuser or a social abuser. Social abusers are mainly those who come under peer pressure at school not to "chicken out". A child may abuse solvents only once, but such is the toxicity of the materials used that one sniff is sufficient to kill. I am aware of two cases of the so-called chicken syndrome, whereby a friend was saying, "Come on, try it; it gives you a bit of a high, but there are no problems, we have done it before" —and those children are now dead.

Society must see what it can do to identify children who are at risk, why they become involved and what we can do about it. The House has rightly turned its back on criminalising those who are involved in solvent abuse, and has looked to social changes to try to tackle the problem. Forty-six per cent. of children who die from solvent abuse are found at home. Children under 17 are most at risk, and single parents in particular need support.

Many of those who died were under the influence of other people—older children or their peers. It is important that the House should make a commitment to give resources and to work with Resolve in the voluntary sector and with local education departments to develop special projects to bring to the attention of children at school the damage that can result from solvent abuse and to enable teachers to identify children at risk.

We must deal at local level with those who sell solvents. Often, shopkeepers sell solvents because they are ignorant of the use to which they will be put. Following legislation, it is now a criminal offence to sell solvents to children but, tragically, a small hard core of retailers are prepared to sell solvents to schoolchildren knowing that they will not be used for the stated purpose. That is not just my view; it is shown in surveys conducted earlier this year by Resolve and local authorities in Cheshire and Newcastle. Industry and the Government should give additional financial resources to assist Resolve to run training schemes at local level for retailing employees who sell these dangerous solvents.

School practices should be changed. There is no need to use Tippex when water-based solutions do the job just as adequately and pose no danger to schoolchildren. Resources are not always needed—all it takes is a common-sense approach by the Government and retailers to remove from shop shelves those solvents which are readily available to schoolchildren and which, if sniffed, may kill them. Any Government who are concerned about the family, particularly children, can take that reasonable approach on board.

Amusement arcades are another source of child exploitation. Since 1987, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) has twice tried to change the law to regulate the amusement arcade industry. The Minister may reply by saying that the Home Office is satisfied with self-regulation. My experience as a Member of Parliament who has been involved with groups of children addicted to amusement arcade gambling is that self-regulation does not work. Few amusement arcade owners do anything practical to prevent children under 16 from using their premises. Indeed, were it not for the under-16s using those arcades, the clientele would be significantly reduced.

I know of cases of young people who became involved in car thefts organised by adults who had hung about amusement arcades, first giving the young people money to feed their habit and then using them to steal, while the adult criminals got away with the booty.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) spoke eloquently about problems in inner-city areas. He will know of the large-scale inquiry into prostitution rackets involving female and young male teenagers who are recruited from amusement arcades because they are vulnerable and because their gambling can be exploited.

Mr. Alton: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments about the acute problems in the centre of Liverpool. Is he aware that one in five of those who visit the amusement arcades are estimated to be under nine?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman is right. That happens in my area as well. When local authorities have attempted, through their planning and other regulations, to prevent such premises from opening, their decisions have been overturned on appeal by the Department of the Environment, and the Home Office has been unwilling to replace self-regulation with a regulatory system.

Why should the industry be worried about the loss of self-regulation? Arcade owners who do not allow children on their premises have nothing to fear from legislation. Only those who exploit young children and those who allow their premises to be used by criminals who exploit children have something to fear.

Every day, tens of thousands of young people are involved with amusement arcades. Some take part in criminal activities; some steal from their parents; some leave school at lunchtime to go to an amusement arcade and use the money that they have been given for food to feed their gambling habits. Many of the problems that relate to children being out of school can be traced back to local amusement arcades.

If we are serious about dealing with this social problem, Government assistance is needed, as well as involvement by parents and local authorities. If we do not tackle that problem, a small percentage of the young generation will be involved in a gambling tradition which is exploited by criminals and others involved in prostitution. I am sure that the House would not like that to continue without doing something about it.

5.26 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on his success in the ballot and I thank him for enabling us to debate this important issue. We live in an age when practice may have changed but, sadly, all too often attitudes have not. The prevailing attitude among many people is that a wife should stay at home, looking after the children, or locked to the kitchen sink preparing her husband's tea or evening meal. I do not in any way downgrade those mothers and wives who wish to stay at home. It is a noble profession to look after the house and bring up children and it should on no account be criticised.

We live in a different era when many women prefer to go out to work or have to go to work from financial

necessity. There are two sides to the coin. Everyone should have the right to choose to stay at home and should not be criticised for doing so or be considered dull, miserable or old-fashioned for following that course. Equally, everyone should have the right to choose to go out to work, earn a living and receive the stimuli of a working profession and career.

It is utterly wrong to think that, as soon as one has a child, one must give up the career that one enjoyed in order to stay at home. The trouble is that, all too often, people look down their noses at working mothers and think that they are worse mothers for going out to work or they think that the children are deprived of love and affection and the security of a home.

I speak from a little personal experience. In the light of some of the suggestions that I shall make, perhaps I should declare an interest. My wife is a working wife and we have a young daughter who is just over three. From the day my daughter was born, I knew that my wife would continue her career as soon as that was feasible and that that would entail someone else looking after our daughter during the day. Perhaps foolishly, but for the first 12 months after my wife returned to work, I was embarrassed when the inevitable question came: "What do you do with your daughter during the day?" I fell into the old trap. I thought that people would think that we were less good parents because one of us did not stay at home to look after that child. I used to hum and ha but finally, with many justifications and explanations, I would confess that our daughter went to a creche during the day. I explained how wonderful it was for her, how she enjoyed the company of other children, how she was learning to share more and get on with other children at an earlier age than she would otherwise have done.

After about 12 months I thought about the way in which I had behaved and realised that there was no reason why I should attempt to justify what we were doing or feel embarrassed about it. There was nothing wrong with it. Certain children enjoy the company of other children all day. They enjoy the stimuli that they get from each other, the constant attention given by the people looking after them, and the love that they receive—provided that they return in the late-afternoon or early evening and at the weekend to a secure and loving family home.

I make no apology for my view that everyone who wishes to take that decision should be able to do so. Sadly, some people have that decision forced upon them for economic reasons, and we must consider the awful cost of child care for people who wish to return to work. The problem affects not only those families on low incomes or single-parent families, although it is obviously greater for them. In many parts of the country it is virtually impossible to break out of the poverty trap. It is a vicious circle which traps them at home when they would dearly like to have the choice of working. Their weekly income is simply not sufficient to enable them to afford a child minder or place their child in a creche and still provide a reasonable standard of living for themselves and their families. Facilities range from child minding, which is a relatively inexpensive option—although I choose my words carefully—to the kind of creche in which I place my daughter. That costs £500 a month which, over a year, is more than it costs to send children and young people to many of our public schools.

Child care can be an expensive business and it is out of far too many people's range. There is a range of options for the care of one's children—creches, child minders and nannies who live in—but they all cost money. The Government must consider carefully the question of tax relief on the money that is paid out, which is earned income in all cases. The tax man twice gets his share of the cake: he taxes the money earned by the parent and does not give tax relief on the fees paid out of that taxed income. For many single parents, tax relief could make the difference between staying at home, trapped on income support and other benefits, and going out to work to gain experience and build the foundations of a career that will lead to an improved standard of living.

There is a problem with child minders. A few councils adopt rules that I find quite incomprehensible. My own county council—Essex—is one of them. According to that council's rules, one child minder may look after only three children. Clearly, child minding cannot be made into a business with 12 or 18 children being looked after by one person, because that is not sensible, but nor is it sensible to apply a rigid rule. When I dealt with a constituency case 18 months ago, I could not understand the county council's resistance and lack of flexibility. A lady who had been a registered child minder for 19 years was looking after three children. Then, one of the mothers found a place for her child for half a day each week in the local nursery run by the education authority. She was expecting another baby and wanted that new-born child to be looked after by the child minder whom she had used for many years. With the older child being looked after only on a part-time basis, the child minder would, in effect, have been looking after three and a half children a week. She was not allowed to do that. The rules said that she could look after only three children. There was no argument, no compromise and no flexibility. That seemed to me to be pointless bureaucracy. It is a pity that local authorities are not more flexible.

Playgroups and nursery schools are not the answer when it comes to helping women back to work. They do a magnificent job in their different ways but they usually provide facilities on a part-time basis—a morning or an afternoon session. Even if one is lucky enough to have placed one's child in a nursery on a full-day basis, the hours may not be compatible with one's own working hours if one wants to work full time. In those circumstances, one is stuck. Nursery schools are not an easy option unless one works part time.

Young mothers should take the opportunity to form their own playgroups of creches tailor-made to the needs of their friends and neighbours. Some mothers who would not want to go to work in an office love looking after children and, for reasonable remuneration, they could enable their friends and neighbours to go out to work.

I urge the Minister to use all her influence to press the case with the Treasury, which, for many reasons—some of them perfectly understandable—has been resistant to the idea of providing tax relief. We made a step forward in the Budget introduced by the then Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, last March, in which the £8,500 earnings rule in respect of taxation for workplace nurseries was abolished. In Chelmsford, and, I am sure throughout the country, more workplace nurseries have been developed. Smaller companies that could not embark on such projects on their own have joined forces to set up workplace nurseries. That has been a bonus and it has worked.

The Treasury should reconsider. It should not be blinkered. It should not close its eyes but should

[Mr. Simon Burns]

re-examine the need to help more people back to work. It should stop condemning people who desperately want to go back to work—or to go to work—but cannot because they are stuck in the poverty trap.

It is all a question of attitude. Three years ago, I tabled an early-day motion calling for creche facilities in this place. I think that I was the first hon. Member to do that. We have a work force of thousands and I see no reason why we should not have a creche. Government Departments are now developing workplace creches. At the time, some of my hon. Friends thought that I was bananas. They thought that mine was an extraordinary view for a Tory to take and that there must be something wrong with me. I was new to this place and they probably thought, "He does not know his way around." Their attitude was that Tories did not behave in that way. I ask, "Why not?" Why should not those employed in the Palace of Westminster—not only hon. Members but the back-up staff of thousands, many of whom have young children —enjoy the same benefits and help as those employed elsewhere?

Ms. Richardson: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman supported the idea of a creche in the Houses of Parliament which is something for which we have been working for a very long time. I hope to goodness that we will have a creche one day. What about the need for creche facilities for the staff in this place who work split shifts? Catering staff come in, prepare lunches and have a couple of hours off in the afternoon. They then have to return to prepare dinners. They need support and help. Care for children within the confines of the Palace of Westminster would be very useful for those people.

Mr. Burns: That is an extremely valid point. I hope that we can address that problem if right hon. and hon. Members could persuade the powers that be——

Ms. Richardson: The Leader of the House.

Mr. Burns: Yes indeed, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House—that creche facilities are a reasonable proposition. They are not a gimmick or something that we have to fight over for years to come. However, I accept that my view might be unfashionable among many of my colleagues.

Maintenance and divorce are clearly pressing problems facing many women. Even now husbands or partners can walk out of the family home and totally abandon any financial responsibility for their children. The mother must then turn to the state for support. Far too often, the level of income support that the state provides is well below that which the errant husband or father could afford to raise the children involved. We may find it incomprehensible that fathers or partners can behave in that way, but that is a major fact of life and it happens far too often.

I welcome the Bill that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be presenting to the House to change maintenance payments and to make those errant husbands and fathers financially responsible for their children. That legislation is long overdue. Frankly, it should have been introduced years ago and it would have avoided so much of the suffering and misery that have been inflicted on mothers.

I hope that the law will be changed so that if an errant husband or partner goes abroad he will not be able to evade his financial responsibilities because the Department of Social Security will be able to track him down wherever he goes in the world. That would be a step forward. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), has been active and extremely helpful in that regard.

Why on earth should women have to suffer the hardship, misery and upset of raising their children on their own, which in itself can be extremely difficult, and in addition be burdened with financial worries and problems because of the selfishness of their former partners? I am pleased that that problem will be considered and hopefully, in the majority of such cases, there will be a genuine improvement and benefit for mothers who are treated in that way.

The Lord Chancellor's Department is currently considering proposals about the future of our divorce laws. Family life is the essence of society. However, there must be a balance. There is the too-easy divorce whereby one partner, after a row or an argument, can simply throw up his or her hands and say, "Right, that's it. I can't stand you any longer, I'm going." That is too easy. On the other hand, it would be wrong to have the law too tight so that two warring factions are imprisoned in a home from which they cannot break out. There is nothing more debilitating or miserable for a child than to have to live in a family home with two parents for ever at each other's throats.

Mr. McCartney: We must consider reconciliation in family courts and the need to make things as easy as possible once it has been decided that a marriage has broken down irretrievably. In this country we tend to enter legalistic situations in which the only people who benefit from a marriage breakdown are the solicitors acting for either party.

We must rely on our perception of what is best for the children. Very often the last thing of concern to legislators is the children. We tend to create legislation under which it is even more difficult to end marriages.

I hope that we will not argue, as has been argued in another place, that divorce is far too easy and that it should be tightened up. I have found that in a general sense the legalistic activities involved in divorce are as damaging as the break-up itself. We should have family courts that can ease the position for children and the parents.

Mr. Burns: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. We do not want to relax the divorce laws so that a partner can simply walk out of the home and so end the marriage. There should be more attempts at genuine conciliation. However, once it has been established that the marriage, for whatever reason, has irrevocably broken down, it is only right that the marriage should be ended as swiftly and painlessly as possible for the children and the partners involved so that they can then get on with rebuilding their lives and repair the damage and emotional scars.

I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South for allowing us this debate during which we have been able to raise many issues about which we all feel deeply.

5.48 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I whisper to the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) that nothing makes life for a young Member of Parliament so perilously difficult with his colleagues as producing a few practical and sensible ideas about how the Palace of Westminster could work more easily. I speak with fellow feeling, because I once found myself in the office of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition for having suggested a better use for accommodation. I will leave it at that, but I felt for the hon. Member for Chelmsford in that respect.

In some ways, this debate is rather like Emperor Nero and the burning of Rome. Although in normal circumstances I would have agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), who said that we can discuss such important matters only by private initiative, it is incredible that the House cannot have time this week to discuss the Gulf, while we can debate this subject and mining subsidence tonight. I will leave it at that, because such matters would be more properly raised in an application under Standing Order No. 20. However, I believe that it is legitimate to refer to Gulf families. I ask that factual question straight away in the hope that the Home Office can provide some answer.

At Dumbarton Denny Hall on Friday night, and frequently since, I have been asked, as a Scottish Member of Parliament, whether it is true that nearly or more than 40 per cent. of the service men in the Gulf are Scots. The figure that is given is 13,500-plus, but there has been much comment on it. I simply ask whether someone in the Official Box or from the Ministry of Defence can answer that factual question. At the public meeting that was arranged by the Dumbarton Labour party and attended by many people of no party at all, I could not answer that factual question.

Hon. Members have received a letter from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in which he says:

"Dear Colleagues"—

I imagine that it is to every Member of Parliament—

"As you may know, many Gulf Support Groups have been set up throughout the UK by the mothers, families and friends of personnel serving in the Gulf, and by others who wish to help. These groups aim to provide comfort and support to our personnel over and above the welfare services available from the Armed Forces. They are writing supportive letters to our troops and sending gifts from their local communities.

I believe these activities are worthwhile and should be encouraged. If there is a group in your constituency I am sure they would welcome your interest and support."

So it goes on.

My childhood memory of my mother is that, for six years, she was involved in the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association. I do not in any way run down the work that SSAFA does, but I offer my controversial opinion that such letters are not the way in which to help families in the Gulf. They should be told the brutal truth that any land battle on top of an oilfield would mean such misery that it would resemble not the events of 1939 but those of 1915 and 1916—the Somme and Passchendaele. Before anybody dismisses me, I do not know whether anybody present has actually been tank crew. I have. Although not in anger, because it was on ranges, I have helped to fire tank guns. Everybody had better be very clear what the prospect is. It is absolutely appalling for those families. It is no service at all to say that anodyne support is needed. What is needed is a change of policy, a ceasefire and a facing up to the reality of the mire of the middle east.

I do not want to abuse the debate by speaking further about the actualities of general strategies in the Gulf, but certain questions are highly pertinent to the debate. The first question arises from Harry Powers of Galashiels, who received a good deal of publicity during the Christmas recess. Mr. Harry Powers is a state registered nurse working at the Dingleton psychiatric hospital near Melrose. He approached me in circumstances in which, as a 44-year-old man, he has received no money from the Ministry of Defence for more than 10 years.

There is the argument that, somehow, reservists were getting money and therefore had an obligation to the state to go to a war in the middle east, supposedly under the umbrella of the United Nations—what a fiasco that has become. Nevertheless, the question arose about the rights of reservists. Under precisely what legislation are the Government asking people who are medical reservists or who have some other particular skills to be recalled to units? There is doubt. The 1907 legislation—the original Haldane Act—makes it clear that the Territorial Army and, by implication, the reserve forces do not have any obligations other than to join up in the United Kingdom itself for the defence of the United Kingdom. Nothing——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am finding it very difficult to relate what the hon. Gentleman is now saying to the subject of the motion, which is family policy.

Mr. Dalyell: When family men are called out of jobs in civilian life to serve in the forces, it causes enormous family disruption. Under what Act are the Government doing that? Is it the 1907, 1953 or 1980 legislation?

Mr. McCartney: I do not wish to refer to a specific case, but we are dealing with children in the Gulf and concern for them. Will my hon. Friend consider that currently, in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Gulf states, there are a considerable number of children who have been illegally abducted from the United Kingdom and now find themselves in a war zone? Will my hon. Friend consider what we can do in the short term and in the long term when hostilities end to get those children out of the war zone and back to the United Kingdom where they belong?

Perhaps we should consider bipartisan initiatives. Those children are the original hostages. They are not only unable to return home but are in a war zone. Their mothers in Britain are in the agonising position of not only not having their children with them but of knowing that their children are locked up in horrendous conditions in Kuwait and in surrounding areas.

Mr. Dalyell: Those matters are for proper discussion and study. In family terms, they are exceedingly important. I have a very difficult constituency case—I am sure that all hon. Members have—of a Scots girl who is happily married to a young man in the Yemen and who has problems with issues relating to nationality, proximity to war and so on. I am only too conscious of the relevance of what my hon. Friend says.

There is a second moral issue. Do families have an obligation to send their menfolk to war when that war could be nuclear? I refer to 1945 and 1946. I recall that Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel of the OKW, the German

[Mr. Dalyell]

high command, was executed at Nuremberg on the ground that he had not resisted orders that were crimes against humanity. If service men, on reserve or otherwise, argue that they are to be asked to perform crimes against humanity—that is a highly topical matter when, this very morning, Defence Secretary Cheney did not rule out nuclear weapons, as did Vice-President Dan Quayle, as did General Colin Powell——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman said that he would not abuse the procedures of the House. He is now doing so. He must refer to family policy.

Mr. Dalyell: I should have thought that being yanked out of one's job to go to war was a matter of considerable concern to the families involved. Of course, I bow to your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the benefit of the Home Office, in the hope that it will answer my question, I refer to 28 June 1978, when the United Kingdom gave a legally significant assurance to non-nuclear weapon states that are parties to the non-proliferation treaty of 1968:

"Britain undertakes not to use nuclear weapons against such States except in the case of an attack on the UK, its dependent territories, its armed forces, or its allies by such a State in association with a nuclear-weapon State."

On 17 November 1978 the Americans accepted a similar undertaking. Do the Government respect those undertakings? Have they set out any code of conduct under which men may be extracted from their families to go to a war which all too probably will turn out to be nuclear?

My third question is about the position of Muslim communities in Britain. In a written question today, I asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

"what advice he is giving to those who have booked pilgrimages to Mecca or Medina."

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), replied:

"Our advice to visitors to Saudi Arabia is that it is better to avoid travel, unless they have strong reasons to go there. The cities of Mecca and Medina are a good distance away from the area of hostilities but air services to Saudi Arabia are restricted. It is for individuals to decide whether to proceed."

The lifetime pilgrimage of many families in Britain to holy places is often arranged, for financial and other reasons, some years in advance. It is a matter of central importance to the family. Are we saying that they should not go?

What is the policy on Ramadan? These are matters of considerable importance to a great many families, not only in Britain but throughout the Muslim world. The war is already much longer by modern standards than other wars, such as Yom Kippur and the six-day war, and looks as if it will go on and on. Now that we are into day 18, what is the policy of Muslim families in Britain in this exceedingly delicate situation?

I promised to limit my speech in terms of time. The matters that I have raised are important questions to which the Government should address themselves in these terrible circumstances. The blunt truth is that, in all this, the loss of face of politicians is as nothing to the loss of human life and the catastrophe for the environment.

We are on the issue of rights and, before I finish, I wish to mention the rights of the animal world. I am not ashamed to raise the matter. There is a moral question to consider. Do human beings have the right by their own folly to pursue brutal wars in which entire species may become extinct from the face of the planet? I refer not only to dugongs, sea cows, hawksbill turtles and green turtles. Many other species will face extinction if the war is allowed to continue. Therefore, I shall use any parliamentary opportunity, as will some of my hon. Friends, to suggest that we should accept the proposal of the Magreb countries and Iran and have a ceasefire in the folly being pursued in our name and that of the United Nations.

6.3 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): It was 1942, three years into the second world war, when the Beveridge report on social conditions in Britain came out. I doubt whether the type of speech that we have just heard was made in the parliamentary debate on that report.

If I may be permitted to respond to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for just one, or perhaps two, sentences, the Iranian leader said that he saw no suggestion whatever of movement from the Iraqi leaders. Also, the Gulf support groups deserve recognition. They are doing honourable work.

I do not wish to take away from any hon. Member the opportunity to put forward his or her view as often as possible on subjects of interest, but I take family policy seriously. I first introduced a debate on it 13 years ago and did so a second time in 1982. I felt that it was an intrusion in the general feeling in the Chamber today for the hon. Gentleman to use the opportunity to raise again issues which he has other opportunities to raise.

Mr. Dalyell: No, we have not. That is part of the trouble.

Mr. Bottomley: Will the hon. Gentleman please not interrupt my speech? I did not interrupt his.

There are 11 million children under the age of 16 in Britain. They and their parents could make good use of a debate on family policy which lasts only for three and a half hours. Among those children are some whom I would call the children of the state. I shall return to them on a different day. They are children in care, children in penal institutions and children whose life chances have been blighted, not because they have experienced failure but because they and their parents have never experienced success. They are the groups who deserve more attention. One cannot dwell on them in this debate except to say that the marvellous work of, among other organisations, the Children's Society, with its central London project, shows that 40 per cent. of children under the age of 16 who are at risk of being drawn into child prostitution are formally under a care order. They are children of the state; they are under the care of local authorities. The system is failing them. It is a double failure. The first failure is that the children have to be taken away from their families in the first place. The second is that they run away from the caring institutions of the local authority. We should pay more attention to the children of the state. They are a sign of how our emergency services are needed and how they sometimes fail.

I prefer to deal now with the way in which the family perspective and life cycle is brought in to social and economic policy. I could not have improved on the motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin). The word "well-being" is a good way

of bringing together welfare and material well-being without implying that either the definition of welfare or simply more material goods is necessarily the answer.

All the way through, from Rowntree in 1901, to the Beveridge report in 1942 and the work of Margaret Wynn, who in 1970 wrote the first book "Family Policy" in Britain, we have had to recognise that no caring services work unless they build on the aspirations and reflect the interests of ordinary people in Britain.

Ferdinand Mount, to whom I wish success as editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* which competes with Auberon Waugh's *Literary Review*, wrote a book in 1982-83 entitled "The Subversive Family". It showed that every major institution, whether Church or state, -ism or -wasm, which began by seeking to destroy the influence of the family had to recognise that the family had more continuity of power and ambition than ideology could compete with. Eventually the ideology, whether Christianity or Marxism, had to adopt the family rather than seek to supplant it.

There is no driving force on this earth as powerful as the ambitions and aspirations of the urban working class. I could go a stage further. Perhaps I will obtain the assent of the hon. Member for Linlithgow. By considering the family perspective and whether the family's life cycle comes into social and economic policy, we can unite Muslim and Christian, urban and rural, north and south, and rich and poor. In no other way is there any continuity of interest between generations with which people can identify, whatever their ethnic or other background.

The family brings together people who are Catholic and non-Catholic in Northern Ireland. It brings together people of all backgrounds in our inner cities. It rightly shows that, although we may not all have children, and celibacy is not an inherited condition, we have all been brought up by parents or parent substitutes. Caring for children and our elderly parents is something which we all have in common. The state can never be a substitute; strength comes from building on the confidence and competence of ordinary people in Britain.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said in the best speech at the UNICEF debate in New York on 30 September last year:

"for children the family is the most important factor in their lives".

The same applies to many elderly people, especially the frail elderly, whose children look after them in their turn. It is part of the inter-generation contract. She continued:

"The dominant influence on a child's health is the family . . . The dominant influence on a child's behaviour is the family . . . The dominant influence on the success of a child's education is the interest taken by the family in the work of the teacher and the school.

The most important thing that we can do as parents . . . after looking after the material needs of our children, is to give our children our time, our affection and our wise counsel."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South rightly identified, there are a series of issues where family policy can become part of our politics. We know that, as politicians, we fail at times. If I wanted to be partisan I would point out that it was a Labour Chancellor in 1968 who said:

"Next year I hope to introduce full selectivity for family allowances and to do it in such a way that people who are not in real need of them do not draw them at all."

It is exactly the same point of view as that put forward by Mr. David Willetts—who may come to the House; then we could have a debate on equal terms. The problem with having a debate with him outside the House and me inside is that he gets the publicity and no one pays much attention to me.

Succeeding generations of Conservative politicians need to realise that a universal child cash allowance is the means of recognising that taxable capacity is reduced when people have dependent children and their needs are increased. Child benefit is not a poverty measure—it never was and it never will be. Income support is a poverty measure.

Child benefit is a taxation/benefit issue, and the sooner that we can find a way to think of tax, net of child benefit, in the hands of the Inland Revenue, with the Department of Social Security used as the paying agency, with the Chancellor being the only person concerned with the level of child cash allowance—as I now refer to child benefit—the sooner we will return to common sense.

A working couple with a mortgage of £30,000, with two personal tax allowances and the additional married man's allowance, who are paying higher rate tax, receive the equivalent of 12 child benefits, without Jilly Cooper, David Willetts or anyone else complaining about the waste of tax expenditure. I hope that we shall hear slightly less about how a switch to child tax allowances is better—it is worse.

Anyone who listened to Radio 4's finance programme this morning would have heard someone asking, "Should I pay off my mortgage as I have some money?" The answer was, "No. You would be a fool to do so." Mortgage interest relief on a £30,000 mortgage is equivalent to three child benefits and continues until we retire, or even when we are pensioners. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) nods in agreement.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): I was nodding in agreement because I am in agreement. Benefit paid to the mother, especially to those with children under five, is—as my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) said—of great importance, and is at the heart of Conservative philosophy. It must not be lost in too many clever taxation techniques. Support for mothers with young children is important and support for the family is important because it creates allegiance within society, and that is at the heart of Conservatism.

Mr. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend for intervening. Money is not the only issue. As he says, allegiance and loyalty are also important.

I have the booklet from a series of Thames Television called "City Priest Voices from the City". Thames rightly gave a voice to many Church leaders in inner cities—not merely Anglicans but priests from many free and Pentecostal churches. The common ambition of people, whether their background is Afro-Caribbean, Asian or poor white, is the same. They have the same sense of solidarity. To use one priest's words:

"The ground is level at the foot of the Cross."

That reminds us about caring for other people and sharing their burdens. In this rich, western country we can afford to arrange matters so that people with the burden of a particular handicap can be helped. The most obvious handicaps are physical and mental, but we must also remember that at any one time three quarters of our children are looked after by one fifth of the households. If we do not introduce a life cycle approach, we shall not get very far.

[Mr. Bottomley]

In a book called, "Family Matters, Perspectives on the Family and Social Policy" published on behalf of the Royal Society of Medicine, in a chapter which I contributed, I examined the issues of: families and economic well-being—money and the chances of employment; and families and human needs—health, housing, child care and handicapping conditions.

When Michael Rutter produced his book, "15,000 Hours" which studied the results of 11, matched, south-east London comprehensive schools, he showed that the most able children at the worst school produced poorer results than the least able children at the best school, even though the staff:pupil ratio was the same, they had the same number of pound notes per child and they were in the same education authority. The authority's only concern was to keep secret the names of the schools that were doing especially badly or especially well, so that parents should not know what was happening to their children. That is an example of how the mood has changed. I would not want to stigmatise schools, but if we did not let parents know about such research results, we could not be said to have freedom of information.

This may be considered a partisan point but, when we tried to focus on child immunisation a year ago—a serious area of child health—because 20 per cent. of our children were not getting the immunisation that they should have got, the Labour party wished to set a lower standard in the inner cities because of the difficulties there. Yet children in the inner cities have the greatest needs and, therefore, we should set the highest standards there. Professionals working there should set out to achieve results as good as those achieved in Esher.

In my chapter in the book "Family Matters", under the heading "Families: Challenges and Responsibilities", I examined the following:

"Preparation for Marriage and Family Life
Specific Supports for Families
Parents and Children
Family Violence
Substance Abuse
Ageing and Families"—

the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) mentioned substance abuse in a very good speech—and under the heading "Families and Major Institutions" I referred to:

Government
Media
Community Institutions
Law

An editorial in *The Guardian* on 24 December 1990—that shows how important it regards family policy; it printed the article the day before Christmas when no doubt all of us are studying the newspapers with extra special care while we are waiting for the midnight service—said:

"Here is a Thatcherist theme worth pursuing"—

referring to it being time to look after the family. Unless we can build that upon helping the family to look after themselves as well as being willing to step in when the family cannot cope, we are lost.

We need to do the things that bind us together. We need to set outcome targets so that we reduce the number of children in persistent trouble with the courts. At the moment one male in three has a serious criminal record by the time he is 30. Too many children come into care. The emergency services, at great expense, must come in after a failure rather than give support before it.

My last argument, which I hope will gain support from hon. Members on both sides of the House as it follows on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), is that if we say that looking after children is as important as looking after cars, perhaps we could convert some of the massive tax expenditure on company cars and the massive commercial cost of providing car parking spaces at work to the provision of help for children, whether they are looked after at home, near the home or at work.

6.17 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I was interested in what the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said about Beveridge's reforms in 1942. I recall newspaper articles written at the time which described, in dramatic terms, the evil giants that had to be slain—he was talking about freedom from want, ignorance, fear and illness. The Labour Government in 1945 introduced the great reforms based on Beveridge's plan. Such was the force of public opinion in Britain at the time which was in favour of those reforms that no one dared to attack that. Those reforms were introduced by a Labour Government with consent from the Conservative Opposition at the time.

The Labour Government introduced better pensions, the health service, universal education and decent housing at affordable rents. That brought families like mine out of the slums into decent housing. They achieved that by an immense programme of public sector building. The Conservatives' record of the past 11 years has slipped a great deal from the view that they held in 1942.

Labour wants to progress from Beveridge who—understandably, in the 1940s—wanted the father to be the bread-winner and the mother to remain always at home, to produce the conventional picture of mum, dad, two children and a dog. We maintain that women have a right to work and to receive proper payment for it, and that adequate child care facilities should be available to them, so that they can play a fuller role in society. The Government are tying themselves in knots, because half of them think that women should stay in the kitchen, and the other half agree that they should be able to work. The Government have failed to devise reasonable policies. As time is short, I will leave it at that.

6.20 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): We have all benefited from hearing the differing views of right hon. and hon. Members in this interesting debate. I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on his choice of subject, and even on the blandness of his motion, although I quarrel with the hon. Gentleman's reference, in respect of families, to the Government

"continuing to support and increase their confidence and competence by extending choice".

In fact, the Government do not have any policies for supporting the family. The reverse is true.

The words "family" and "family policies" have been bandied about for years. Many right hon. and hon. Members—although none of those present in the Chamber now—wail and wring their hands over the disappearance of what they think of as the ideal family, of

the kind to which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) referred. It is meant to comprise a working husband, dependent wife, and two or three children—all living securely and happily in a nice home. That is some people's vision of a happy family, but it has never been true to say that all families are like that.

In reality, in former days there were millions of poor families. Women often bore large numbers of children, who lacked sufficient food. Many kids had to go to work because even the pittance they could earn was a necessary part of the family income. There was no national health service, no welfare benefits, and no sense of responsibility on the part of Governments in those bygone days—which some look back on with a false sense of nostalgia.

Today, more women with children than ever before go to work, but more families also experience divorce. Greater numbers are also remarrying and starting new families. Families come in all shapes and sizes. Some are one-parent families, some contain a disabled person—no one has mentioned that—and in others it is the parents rather than the children who need to receive care. They are as entitled to that care as are children. The well-being of all types of families is fundamental to society's well-being, particularly at times of great change.

Families deliver love and care to children, and it is within families that children learn the ground rules of good citizenship. The way that parents manage that job is important to us all, because children are literally our future. That is why Labour places so much emphasis on the need for coherent policies that will nourish and strengthen family relationship as they really exist—and not as some people imagine they should be.

We all want children to grow up in a secure and loving environment. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) mentioned the problems that confront children today, yet, over the past 11 years, Britain has suffered the biggest increase in poverty levels of any European country—and its children have suffered most. In 1979, 12 per cent. of children lived below the poverty line, but that figure increased to a shameful 26 per cent.—more than double—by 1986, and today more than 2 million children live in families that are on or below the poverty line.

Low wages, changes to the benefits system, poor housing, and less child care mean that millions of parents —especially single parents—cannot keep their children off benefit and off the poverty line. They need new opportunities and to be able to care for their families.

Everyone needs a home, yet the Government have presided over a decade of increasing homelessness, and allow the scandal of bed-and-breakfast accommodation to continue. That form of housing in itself creates strain, and often results in families breaking up. It has also increased the number of children suffering illness and accidents, and the number of babies born prematurely or at low birth weights.

When a Labour Government come to power, one of their first policies will be to provide sufficient decent and affordable housing to meet the nation's needs. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South referred to the right to buy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) said, we are in favour of that right, but believe that alongside it should run the opportunity for local authorities to build good quality, affordable, rented property for those who cannot afford to buy.

Child benefit was introduced by the last Labour Government, and it remains the only benefit to be paid directly to the person who cares for the child—in the overwhelming number of cases, its mother. The Government's own social security statistics, published a few days ago, show that child benefit is currently worth less than at any time since 1977, and worth less to families with three or more children than at any time since Labour introduced the family allowance 46 years ago, in 1945.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Eleanor Rathbone, an independent Member of Parliament, took that legislation through Parliament before the 1945 election. The House debated that measure for three hours, and no one voted against it. It is not quite proper for the hon. Lady to claim the credit only for her party.

Ms. Richardson: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point, but it does not change the fact that the value of the family allowance has been greatly reduced.

The Government froze child benefit in 1987, and now propose to increase it from £7·25 to £8·25—but only for the first child. In 1977, during the life of the last Labour Government, the allowance was worth £6·24 at 1990 prices, and the present payment of £21·75 for three children is the lowest since 1945. That is disgraceful, and it is scandalous that the value of that benefit should drop so low.

The sharp increase in 1989 of nearly 8 per cent. in income support for lone mothers sent the Government scurrying away to find a means of compelling fleeing fathers to pay maintenance, to reduce dependence on income support. I support the principle, but we must ensure that women who cannot or will not reveal the identity of their former partner will not be disadvantaged. A future Labour Government will restore the full value of child benefit by uprating it in line with inflation for every child in the family. We believe that that is the way to do it.

The motion calls for extending choice in employment —"Hear, hear" to that. The Government, however, have never had a coherent employment policy. We need a talent-based, highly skilled work force, and we need to develop and train the various talents that people possess. Many of those talents are undervalued—they are certainly underpaid, particularly those of women who struggle to work for their families.

The Government proudly say that Britain has the largest number of working women in any European country. That is true, but the increase has come about because of the need for part-time work to fit in with family responsibilities. Part-time work can be excellent and valuable, but the majority of part-time women workers do not receive, pro rata, the pay of full-time workers. Most of them have no right to holiday and sick pay entitlement, which is a disgrace. Home workers, and temporary or casual workers, are treated even more badly, but the work they do is a valuable part of industry.

Last Friday, I received a letter from a constituent which pulls the whole thing together. It relates to a traditional family—a working husband, a dependent wife and three children. The husband is self-employed and the wife has no job outside the home. She had a job but lost it, because the firm for which she worked went bust. The husband owes £350 tax to the Inland Revenue, the couple cannot pay their poll tax and they are in arrears with the mortgage.

[Ms. Richardson]

They are afraid that non-payment of the poll tax will put them in prison and the children into care. They fear that, if they cannot pay the mortgage, they may lose their home and the children may have to go into care.

My constituent is trying to find a job. The letter states:

"I'm not lazy and I'm not stupid but trying to find a job is very hard. I do work at home gluing folders and various other things. This is time consuming and very tiring. Most nights I'm up till 3 a.m. doing it enabling me to earn £40 a week."

She thought of killing herself, but decided that that would be selfish because of her husband and children, and I agree with her. I have not written to her—frankly, I do not know what to say.

The Government's attitude to training is appalling. There are no coherent policies, which means that not only those who want and need to work cannot increase their opportunities and choice, but the whole community loses the profit that training in our education system and beyond would bring. Our public subsidy of child care—about which much has been said—is the lowest in Europe. Our employment legislation is riddled with inconsistencies and loopholes. If we continue with such policies, we shall be Europe's dumping ground.

We must invest in training, child care, effective employment rights and decent pay if we are to ensure a decent standard for families. We must provide more opportunities at work, to work and to continue to work and earn, as well as ensuring better provision for family care. Child care is not a substitute for family care, although I believe that good quality child care helps in the development of children—as I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles said. Child care supports families and helps them to support themselves.

A Labour Government will engineer a package of child care, because we believe that parents should have options. I believe that the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) talked about tax relief on child care, which is one option that might be helpful. However, giving tax relief on child care or child care vouchers would not provide a single extra place, even in a workplace nursery. We need workplace nurseries, good quality, decently paid child minding, pre-school education, including pre-school play groups and nursery education, and out-of-school care to give parents options to choose the best for their children.

Mr. Burns: Does the hon. Lady accept that, if there were tax relief for working mothers or potential working mothers, it would encourage the development of more creches to meet a need? Those people who previously could not entertain the idea of working because it was financially impossible could probably bridge that gap with tax relief and find it worth while to work. That would bring more demand for creches and other forms of child care, which would mushroom as a result.

Ms. Richardson: We shall have to see how it develops. The Government must co-ordinate with local authorities on all the available options. If the Government decide to give some tax relief, we shall be able to see how the system works.

I am also keen that the Government should ask local authorities to give them their action plans for child care, so that we can ensure that child care is available throughout the country and not on a patchwork basis. We need partnerships with local authorities, employers, parents and voluntary agencies, but the Government need to co-ordinate those partnerships—and the Government are not doing so. That is a great shame, because it deprives so many parents of the option of going to work, leaving it all to the hit and miss of the workplace.

We have the most rigid maternity rights in the whole of Europe. We have no statutory paternity rights and no concept of parental leave, which would allow us to start to change the culture whereby it is always accepted that the woman looks after the children and the husband goes out to work, without sharing in the rewards and responsibilities of child care. We need all those developments, and we need the Government to introduce them.

I know that somebody, probably the Minister, will say that we cannot adopt the directive on maternity and allow the European standard on maternity provision because it would cost too much. However, my information is that it is estimated that only 1 per cent. of female workers in Europe are pregnant at any one time, so it would hardly be a costly exercise—*[Laughter.]* I obviously said something funny.

Finally, I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that today is the 20th anniversary of the setting up of the first women's aid refuge. I hope that the Minister will join me in paying tribute to all those people who worked so hard to provide refuges throughout the country. From a survey that I have just conducted, I know that we have only 275 refuges for victims of domestic violence. We have been talking about divorce—some of those refuges are for people fleeing from violent partners. We do not have enough refuges, and we need six times as many places. More work needs to be done in collecting statistics on how many women are in difficulties. That is something that Government should and could be doing.

Only one quarter of all local authorities provide, or help to provide, refuges. That is a disgrace which should be corrected. It is just another example of the way in which the Government could help to provide secure funding for refuges to enable them to continue in the proper way.

Like others, I have had to range over a wide variety of options—policies that the Opposition believe should be introduced. As hon. Members know, Labour will have a Ministry for Women. We believe that policies need to be co-ordinated, and that the work of Government Departments in connection with women and the family should be no exception to that rule. There should also be a Minister for children to co-ordinate the work done by a number of Departments to deal with children's problems. Together, those two Ministries should ensure that all our policies bear in mind the fact that the family is the responsibility not only of itself but of everyone else, and that Government must play its part.

It is, I suppose, a pity—from his point of view—that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South will not be here after the next election—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."]—but I hope that, when we have a Labour Government who start to introduce a coherent set of policies, he will watch and applaud and will remember this evening, when he initiated the debate.

6.41 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) did not necessarily wish

to be congratulated on obtaining this slot, or on choosing this important subject for debate; nevertheless, I congratulate him on both. He has prompted an extremely interesting discussion, in which a number of hon. Members from both sides of the House have been able to make some valuable comments.

At the beginning of his speech, my hon. Friend mentioned that he could have chosen nuclear physics or local government finance as his subject. It was his second choice that made me wonder whether I was not rather fortunate to be responding to a debate on family policy!

My hon. Friend gave us an interesting quotation from Philip Larkin about the make-up of a family. A number of other hon. Members have asked the same question: what is the family today? Philip Larkin was right in what he said about grandparents. I am a grandparent, and the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) is the youngest grandparent in the House—at any rate, I have no reason to suppose that he is not; he may also be the smallest, but we do not know about that. Perhaps he can help us in the context of what the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) said about the number of pregnant women in Europe at any given time.

I am very interested by the definition of "the family". Hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed interesting views. The continuing debate about the proper role for women within the family hinges on the sad fact that there are currently far more marriage breakdowns than there have been in recent years. I agree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton): it is nightmarish to realise that one in three marriages appear likely to result in a family breakdown.

All that gloom, however, should not mask the fact that the death of the family and the death of marriage are by no means on the horizon. It is true that we now see more divorces and more single parents; it is true that more female members of the family choose to go out to work —some because they wish to, and others because they feel that they must.

We must not exaggerate the changes, however. If the institution of marriage did not exist, I believe that we would busily set about inventing it, because it is the best and most satisfactory way in which to ensure that people can raise young children against the background of love, warmth and affection described by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). He cited the speech that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) made to UNICEF, in which she said that time, affection and wise counsel were the most important factors to be devoted to the raising of children.

Mrs. Fyfe: Can I take it from the Minister's remarks that she, like me, disapproves of parents sending their children away to boarding school at the tender age of seven?

Mrs. Rumbold: I cannot agree with the hon. Lady. Such matters are entirely up to individual families; it would be entirely wrong for me, as a Minister—a mere politician —to dictate what people should choose to do with their children. That would be ridiculous. I fear that the hon. Lady will not be happy with that response, but I am certain that it is the right one.

Most of the issues that we have considered relate to the question that I mentioned earlier: what is the family? Is it the nuclear family—man, woman and two or three children—or the larger family, including grandparents, uncles, aunts and so forth? I strongly believe in that second concept. I share the sadness of the hon. Member for Mossley Hill that some of the more bureaucratic processes in—especially—local government planning in past years should have led to the break-up of the extended family, and, in my view, great damage to the basis of our society.

It is perhaps comforting to reflect that we are now seeing a slight reversal of that inherent damage, in that more grandparents are caring for their grandchildren while mothers or fathers are at work. It is reassuring to believe that we have recognised the value of the extended family. I trust that not only individuals such as the hon. Member for Mossley Hill and myself, but the wider world —including those who control such matters—will learn the lessons and perceive the truth about policies that have been set out so badly.

Mr. David Nicholson: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend say that. Does she agree that, although in many instances this country can convey its ideas vigorously to its European neighbours, we may be able to learn from them in the case of the extended family?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that we shall take note of the benefits of the extended family, and the support that it provides—not only when marriages survive for a number of years, but when the partners ultimately find that they cannot make the marriage work, and must resort to as amicable a parting as possible without upsetting the arrangements for the secure raising of the children.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Mossley Hill that the current review of family law encompasses not only an examination of the legal provisions, but the jurisdictional procedures and other arrangements for handling family business in the courts. I share his anxiety that we should not lessen the difficulties involved in achieving divorce, but should instead concentrate on maintaining the family and ensuring that, when divorces must take place for the benefit of both partners, the interest and welfare of the children are of primary concern.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South has a particular interest in Relate. I assure him that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of State are undertaking a review of the work carried out by Relate and other organisations which counsel couples who are going through difficulties. The Government are sympathetic to and support the work of Relate. However, we cannot undertake to increase funding while the review that I have mentioned is being carried out. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees with that.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): I have not had the opportunity to hear the whole debate, but I am pleased to hear my right hon. Friend's reassurance about Relate. I am aware of the work of that body in Wolverhampton and other areas. Relate has asked me whether, if the Government wish to assist it in its work of trying to ensure that there are no further breakdowns, they could give it greater support. My right hon. Friend's kind words are a great encouragement, and I thank her for them.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have also talked to Relate, and I agree that its work is of enormous value.

[Mrs. Rumbold]

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who is not able to be in the Chamber at the moment, spoke about a widow in his constituency who remarried and lost her pension. We will write to him and explain the rules about the issues that he raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) spoke with great conviction about the importance of the role of the wife and mother in raising children. It is interesting to look at what British women actually do and compare it with the second-guessing about what they ought to do or might want that appears in newspaper articles. A high percentage of women choose not to work when their children are five and under. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne said that a woman's work in raising small children is invaluable. Without that basic care for the very small child, we cannot hope to have the building blocks for a sound and well-ordered future society.

The mother is of the greatest assistance during the early years when the baby is growing and learning the basic rules, such as not touching something that does not belong to him, and learning to talk, communicate and mix with others. Sadly, some girls find it difficult to cope with that task. Organisations such as Home Start assist young women in the extremely important task of raising small children. I value that work, especially when it is given willingly by young people who understand that it may well be a personal and financial sacrifice. However, for the welfare and benefit of the young people that they are raising the sacrifice is well worth while.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) raised an equally important issue when he said that many young women have careers. Young women are raised and educated in the expectation that they may go to work, and it is perfectly reasonable and natural to suppose that many of them will look at marriage, child raising and careers as a whole—a totality. They do not necessarily separate one from the other. Some women say, "I prefer to take time off while my children are small." Others reasonably say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford said, "I think that it would be better if I continued with my career, and in order to do that I will make the right arrangements for child care". That brings me to the issue of child care.

I remind the House that the Government have looked carefully at child care and took steps towards improving it in last year's Budget. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is listening carefully to the debate, and no doubt he will read the *Official Report* and note the views of hon. Members about the way in which child care is tackled.

Last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, at that time the Chancellor of the Exchequer, ensured that employers who provided workplace nurseries would have a tax benefit. That benefit extends further than many people appreciate. It is available to employers who participate in the management of nurseries at the workplace or anywhere else, as long as they are involved in the management of those schemes. It applies not only to workplace nurseries—those that are on the premises or on premises financed by the employer—but to out-of-school care schemes, which are much more relevant to the requirements of the potential working mother.

Women often wish to go to work not when the children are babies, but when the youngest child reaches school age. At that point, the woman looks for some assistance, and the out-of-school care schemes are especially important for such women.

Mr. Dalyell: If the Minister is being more than polite and other Ministers really intend carefully to read the report of the debate, may I ask when I may expect an answer to my question about why Scots families with 10 per cent. of the population are apparently supplying 40 per cent. of service men in the Gulf?

Mrs. Rumbold: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman wishes to have a response. I hope that he will forgive me when I say that I am not immediately able to answer. However, I shall ensure that either my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs takes note of the hon. Gentleman's valuable point.

Some of my hon. Friends spoke about child benefit. We have noted the various proposals and especially some of the views contained in recent booklets. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said, they have raised a great deal more interest outside than would have been the case if they had been raised in this forum. Over the years, we have had many debates on the issue. It is accepted that such a large and comprehensive social security system will give rise to much public discussion and a great deal of analysis. I repeat what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has already made clear—that child benefit is and will remain a strong element of our family support policies. I hope that that goes some way towards reassuring some of my hon. Friends, whose interest in the matter is understandable.

I feel strongly about nursery education, but it is often suggested that somehow or other such education would provide a solution to the problems and difficulties confronting the working mother. It is no such thing. Nursery education should never be regarded in that light. In my view, it should be regarded solely as a great benefit for children between the ages of three and five, enabling them to learn better the social attributes and, perhaps, to start some of the other early learning processes. In no way should it be regarded as a mechanism to enable women to work. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford, who is no longer in his place, would agree, as he raised the point. Nursery education is there for the benefit of children. It is available, in one form or another —provided by the voluntary sector, as well as by the local authorities—to 86 per cent. of the children in this country.

I wish, finally, to deal with the whole area of housing —a subject that my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South mentioned and about which he feels very strongly.

It being Seven o'clock, the proceedings on the motion lapsed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 6 (Precedence of Government business).

Orders of the Day

Coal Mining Subsidence Bill

[Relevant documents: Sixth Report of the Energy Committee of Session 1989-90 on Mining Subsidence (House of Commons Paper No. 287) and the Sixth Special Report of the Committee of the same Session containing the Government's Observations on the Sixth Report (House of Commons Paper No. 663).]

Order for Second Reading read.

7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Coal Mining Subsidence Bill represents the culmination of a process of practical reform over a number of years, aimed at improving the arrangements for dealing with subsidence damage caused by coal mining. Hon. Members will be aware that deep mining often lowers the surface land as the overlying geological strata subside into the void created by the removal of coal. This subsidence can result in damage to land and buildings located above such undermining. It has long been recognised as one of the inevitable adverse effects of mining deep coal.

The present arrangements for dealing with coal mining subsidence damage—whether by repair or by the payment of compensation—have two distinct kinds of origin. On the one hand, there were the private agreements between the original landowners and coal mine operators. These might involve a variety of arrangements to deal with the effects of subsidence, as it suited the parties at the time. When the freehold of coal was later taken into public ownership, existing obligations to land owners were preserved. But, otherwise, the National Coal Board—now the British Coal Corporation—was required to make good any subsidence damage or to pay compensation. This is the origin of the provisions in the Coal Industry Act 1975 dealing with coal mining subsidence.

On the other hand, because many landowners had sold the right to extract the underlying coal without any compensation for subsidence damage, considerable hardship was experienced by householders and others who had acquired or built properties on such land at a later date. The resulting sense of grievance led to the Coal Mining (Subsidence) Act 1957, which extended the statutory rights of compensation or repair to owners of all land and buildings damaged by coal mining subsidence, regardless of any agreement entered into by the landowner who had originally sold or leased the coal.

The position at present, therefore, is that an owner, occupier or tenant can seek remedy for subsidence damage either through the 1957 Act or through the 1975 Act. This results in confusion. We therefore want to consolidate the legislation into a single statute and, in so doing, take account of the good practice that has grown up in recent years.

Because the existing legislation was judged, over time, to provide inadequate compensation, British Coal adopted in 1976 a voluntary code of practice, which provides for compensation for damaged chattels and for home loss payments where, as a result of subsidence damage, a person permanently loses his home. It also provides payments to farmers where a farm is no longer profitable because of subsidence damage. Subsequently, the corporation has undertaken to contribute to the costs of professional advice needed to prepare a claim; to make payments on account of residual tilt or structural distortion to repaired buildings; and to make payments to occupiers who endure prolonged inconvenience and disturbance while their homes are being repaired.

Nevertheless, in the early 1980s there were many who still regarded the operation of the subsidence repair and compensation arrangements as unsatisfactory. In 1983, therefore, the Government appointed a committee to review subsidence compensation, under the chairmanship of Lewis Waddilove. We are indebted to Mr. Waddilove and the other committee members for their work. The committee carried out a thorough examination of the position and made 65 recommendations in its report published in 1984. It concluded that the main thrust of the existing provisions, both statutory and voluntary, was right, although some significant gaps remained to be filled.

Most of the recommendations were accepted by the Government in the White Paper of 1987. In 1988 the Government issued a consultative document on the content of new legislation, and much useful advice was received in response. The Select Committee on Energy published last summer a timely and perceptive analysis of current subsidence issues, of which we have taken full account. The Bill is the result. It will repeal the existing legislation and replace it with a comprehensive new statute, which incorporates British Coal's voluntary undertakings.

I shall describe the contents of the Bill as briefly as I can. After the wide definition of subsidence damage in clause 1, part II sets out the remedial action required in response to such damage. Clause 2 imposes an obligation on British Coal to take appropriate remedial action, whether by executing repairs, by paying for repairs, or by making payment in respect of any depreciation in the value of the damaged property.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is it true that British Coal has no obligation to purchase property that has been damaged? Would my hon. Friend be prepared to consider an amendment to make the provision rather tighter?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Indeed, there is no existing obligation on British Coal to purchase all such properties, although it does so in cases of hardship. If my hon. Friend cares to table an amendment it will undoubtedly be considered in Committee.

As with the existing subsidence legislation, the fundamental duty that I have outlined is placed on the British Coal Corporation as the owner of virtually all the coal and coal mines in Great Britain.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I appreciate that an onus is being placed on British Coal. If, in the not too distant future, British Coal should be privatised, would the obligations under this legislation still apply?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The obligations would be transferred to the new owners or operators.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

Where, at present, the corporation issues licences for deep mining, it remains responsible for any resulting subsidence damage, although it can recover the cost of remedying such damage from its licensees.

Clause 3 requires a prospective claimant to serve on the corporation a damage notice describing the damage that has occurred. He must do so within six years of the first time at which he ought reasonably to have been aware of the damage. The clause makes clear what, under existing legislation, has been rather unclear and is consistent with the position as set out in my Department's guidance leaflet which was issued last year and accepted by British Coal. I believe that six years should be an ample period within which to allow the householder to make his claim.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Minister may think that six years is ample time for a person to notify the board, but cases of damage due to mining subsidence occur after six years. Will people be debarred from making claims in such cases?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The six years runs not from the conclusion of mining but from the time that the subsidence damage appeared in the property and the time at which the occupier should have been aware of it or might reasonably be expected to be aware of it. That covers the possibility of cracks being covered by panelling or something similar that prevents the householder from being aware of damage. The six years will run from when he might reasonably have been aware of the damage.

Clause 6 requires the corporation to provide the claimant with a costed schedule setting out the works necessary to make good the subsidence damage, as far as is reasonably practicable, to the reasonable satisfaction of the claimant. That means that the standard of workmanship of such remedial works shall be that which would meet the reasonable satisfaction of the claimant.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The Minister has missed out clauses 4 and 5. Will he give a modest explanation of clause 4?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If I were to go through each of the 50-odd clauses, that would take up most of the time available for the debate. If the hon. Gentleman cares to raise specific points, should he catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall endeavour to respond to them in the winding-up speech.

Clause 8 specifies the circumstances in which British Coal may elect to make a payment in lieu instead of executing remedial works. These include situations where the claimant wishes to carry out the work himself, or to use his own contractor, and where it is proposed to merge other works with the works arising from the subsidence damage. Such payments in lieu are not intended to result in cash compensation in place of repairs.

Clauses 10 and 11 set down the particular circumstances in which British Coal may make a cash payment corresponding to the depreciation in value of the damaged property caused by subsidence. So far as housing is concerned, these circumstances are tightly defined because, in agreement with the Waddilove committee, we wish the primary duty placed on the corporation to be the repair of subsidence damage in order to minimise deterioration of the housing stock. Clause 11 does, however, require the making of a supplementary depreciation payment in the case where a property has been repaired as far as is reasonably practicable, but where, nevertheless, there remains a depreciation in value as a result of the effects of subsidence. One example would be where a building remains somewhat tilted after repairs are completed.

The other clauses in part II complete the arrangements for remedial action to properties damaged by subsidence. Let me mention in particular the new rules governing the operation of so-called "stop notices" served by British Coal in cases where further damage to the property is likely. The corporation will be obliged to review the need to continue a stop notice within a year of the notice being given and to settle claims if no further ground movement will affect the property in the next 18 months.

Part III makes provision for additional remedies, over and above remedial action in respect of damage to land and buildings, and places on a statutory basis for the first time obligations voluntarily assumed by British Coal and recommendations made by the Waddilove committee.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): One of the problems that has been encountered is that British Coal, when providing alternative accommodation, often does so in the form of caravans in the grounds of the houses that have been damaged. It is hard for someone living in what can be described as four-star accommodation then to have to live in a caravan for four or five months. Could such a person insist that his alternative accommodation is up to a standard to which he is entitled?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: British Coal will be obliged to provide reasonable alternative accommodation, although I understand that sometimes householders prefer caravans next door to their homes.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Part of the problem with subsidence repairs is that British Coal provides alternative accommodation to a reasonable standard. However, as it cannot afford more of such reasonable accommodation, there are delays in subsidence repair. Should not more facilities be given to British Coal so that it can take over more properties as temporary housing?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That is essentially a matter for British Coal. We are laying down in statute the obligations and it will be up to the coal operator to meet the requirements.

The Bill makes provision for home loss payments to people who may lose their homes on account of exceptionally severe subsidence damage and for temporary alternative accommodation to be made available if that is necessary for repairs to be carried out.

There is provision to allow the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring the corporation to compensate householders for inconvenience and disturbance which may be caused as a result of repairs being carried out while the householder stays in the house. That would enable British Coal's existing voluntary arrangements for compensation for exceptional inconvenience or disturbance to be placed on a statutory basis, with improvements should that seem desirable. If these and other voluntary arrangements by British Coal work well, regulations may not be necessary, but the reserve powers will exist.

Part III also provides for different forms of compensation to farmers arising from subsidence damage

to their land, such as farm loss payments, crop loss payments, and payments to tenant farmers. It also provides for compensation in respect of moveable property or chattels damaged by subsidence and likewise as regards personal injury.

Part IV deals with preventive works to existing buildings designed to reduce the impact of subsidence damage, with precautionary works to new buildings, and with measures to deal with damage to land drainage systems.

Part V makes a variety of supplementary provisions, including a requirement on British Coal to reimburse any reasonable costs or expenses incurred by a claimant in the successful preparation and prosecution of a claim. I would draw attention in particular to clause 41, which allows the Secretary of State to direct the corporation to prepare and submit for his approval a scheme for the determination of disputes by arbitration. One long-standing difficulty associated with the present statutory arrangements has been the lack of informal and accessible means whereby disputes could be resolved speedily and inexpensively—that concern was expressed by the Waddilove committee. The Lands Tribunal will remain available to deal with disputes. However, the average value of a settled subsidence claim in respect of domestic property is under £3,000. It would not in general be justifiable to take disputes over sums of this order to the Lands Tribunal.

Recognising that difficulty, British Coal has helpfully and commendably arranged for the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators to operate an arbitration scheme tailor made to deal with subsidence problems.

Dr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): We have heard that British Coal is graciously bringing in an arbitration scheme, but there is a major defect to it. British Coal has to give the claimant permission to go to arbitration. How can an arbitration scheme be of any value when the person who is wrong in the dispute can prevent the person who wishes to challenge a decision from going to arbitration? The scheme is worthless unless claimants have the right to go to arbitration, rather than having to seek British Coal's permission to go to arbitration.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I draw my hon. Friend's attention to clause 41, which deals with the issue that he has raised. It would enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to direct the corporation to submit to him a scheme for his approval. An approved scheme would oblige British Coal to be bound by the arbitration and to offer arbitration in cases of the sort to which my hon. Friend has referred. It is our objective to allow all disputes that might arise under the Bill to be resolved by means of arbitration in so far as that is possible. In the event of a dispute, the onus of proof will remain with the corporation to show that any damage is not subsidence damage.

Clause 43 would allow the Secretary of State to direct the corporation to establish a further scheme for the investigation of complaints of unfair treatment or maladministration in connection with the way in which the corporation carries out its duties under the Bill. Again, this is a reserve power that can be used if necessary.

Clauses 44 to 46 require the corporation to provide information about future and past coal mining and subsidence damage to occupiers of property likely to be affected, to prospective purchasers of such property and to local authorities in mining areas. British Coal is shortly to introduce a pilot scheme that will be aimed at notifying individual occupiers of future mining plans and that will become a general requirement once the Bill is enacted.

Subsidence damage can be a traumatic experience for the property owner or occupier. The Bill sets out the obligations of the coal operator and the rights of the property owner. It is the result of long and careful consultation and brings together several Acts and codes of practice into one Bill. I commend the measure to the House.

7.21 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Subsidence damage created by coal mining has been a cause of great distress to many households. Those of us who represent coal mining areas know only too well from our constituents what a costly, time consuming and sometimes agonising experience it can be to make a claim against British Coal for subsidence damage. That is why my colleagues and I have argued for years that it is vital to establish a system that is both fast and fair.

Along with many others in the coalfield communities, we heaved a sigh of relief when at long last the Government found a space in their legislative schedule to introduce the Bill. Many of us cannot understand why it has taken so long to introduce such a measure.

The Minister rightly said that the Waddilove committee was set up in 1983 to examine the repair and compensation system for coal mining subsidence damage. Thanks to the activity of my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), who first introduced a private Member's Bill designed to deal with subsidence damage in 1979, the committee's report was submitted in 1984. It contained 65 recommendations involving changes to the system. It took three years for the Government to respond to the Waddilove report. It was only in 1988 that concrete proposals emerged from the Department of Energy. Thanks to the substantial pressure that has been brought to bear on the Government by many local authorities and other organisations such as the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association, the Coalfield Communities Campaign and, to a large extent, by the Labour party, both nationally and locally, as well as by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, the Bill has been introduced seven years after the Waddilove committee was established.

We welcome the Bill. It is a long overdue measure—I see that the Secretary of State nods in agreement. Last year, as the Minister rightly said, the Select Committee on Energy reported on mining subsidence. It was aware that, despite British Coal's claim that it has implemented many of the recommendations contained in the Waddilove report, there remained considerable dissatisfaction with the repair and compensation system. We are pleased that some of the recommendations set out in the report and reinforced by the Select Committee's findings have been incorporated in the Bill. We welcome them in general terms but we may wish to improve the Bill's provisions at a later stage in our consideration of them.

The method by which British Coal notifies property owners of undermining was criticised by both the Waddilove report and the Select Committee. That is because British Coal fails to communicate with the

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

majority of those who are concerned. That failure could lead to difficulties with later claims. The introduction of an obligation on British Coal to inform owners or occupants of the risk of subsidence will ensure that the majority of owners or occupiers will be made aware of the risk. Despite the reluctance of British Coal, the Bill will allow the use of contractors of a claimant's choice, in certain circumstances, to repair subsidence damage. We welcome that as a positive step forward in handling the problem of subsidence in coalfield areas.

Another positive step is the inclusion in the Bill of a clause on the payment of fees incurred by a claimant. The reimbursement of expenses incurred by a claimant in the pursuance of his claim is a way in which the balance of power between claimants and British Coal can be more evenly matched. It is right also that there is clarification of British Coal's obligation to restore property. I am concerned, however, that as the Bill stands it is British Coal's responsibility to make good the damage so far as it is reasonably practicable to the reasonable satisfaction of the claimant. That part of the Bill will not meet the problem satisfactorily. Many believe that it will allow British Coal to return property to them that is in a worse condition than it was before the damage occurred.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The hon. Gentleman has referred to an issue that is of great concern to many in Wales who have suffered as a result of damage to their property caused by subsidence. Is he satisfied that the Bill deals adequately with permanent depreciation? Repairs may have been carried out in the past, or may be carried out now, but it may be found in future that the house is valued at a lower price than neighbouring houses when properties come on the market. I know of a house with damage that was sold for £18,000 whereas neighbouring houses are being sold for £30,000. It would seem that permanent depreciation is not covered adequately in the Bill.

Mr. Barron: An attempt is being made in the Bill to cover that problem. We shall have to wait to see whether there is permanent damage. I am pleased that a Bill has been introduced to deal with current damage. As I have said, we shall all have to wait to see how successfully damage is repaired.

I have said that the Opposition welcome the introduction of the Bill, but there are parts of it that are seriously deficient. Equally, there are significant omissions. Arbitration was rightly referred to by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock). The Bill allows the Lands Tribunal to remain the authority to deal with certain disputes. However, in a review of procedures for settling disputes that was issued last year, the Government made this admission:

"Representations indicate that claimants are reluctant to appeal to the Lands Tribunal for three main reasons: cost, time and formality."

The review continues:

"Given the formal nature of the proceedings (involving deposition of evidence and cross-examination) and the fact that British Coal will be legally represented, the claimant feels that he too must be legally represented, and is at risk of being required to bear British Coal's costs if he loses his case. Even if he wins, he cannot be certain of recovering all his own legal and other professional costs since the Tribunal will award what it considers to be appropriate costs, which may be less than the costs actually incurred."

An answer that I received from the Attorney-General last week stated that in 1990 only eight cases of mining subsidence were settled at lands tribunals. That bears out the Government's review.

Moreover, the appeal procedure is lengthy. That is largely because of the time taken to prepare evidence that is in a suitable form for the proceedings. Given the Government's findings, we cannot understand why the Lands Tribunal remains the official appeal body for certain claims instead of a body of last resort.

Arbitration must be easily accessible and the delay must be as short as possible. Under the Bill, the Secretary of State "may" require British Coal to draw up an arbitration scheme, but the Minister tried to suggest otherwise. We have not been given details of timescales for arbitration, on what can be referred to arbitration and on the effects of either party not agreeing to it. If British Coal states that subsidence has not occurred, are we saying that it will have a veto and that the claimant could end up in a lands tribunal? If that is so, the Minister has a few weeks to correct it, because it will not get rid of the problems of damage and compensation in coal mining areas. I hope that he will take that on board.

We should be given the opportunity to examine the details of the arbitration proposals so that we can be assured that they will provide the best service to our constituents. Whatever arbitration system is finally established, our constituents will need access to free and independent legal and technical advice, because claimants have not had access to the same advice as British Coal.

In its 1990 discussion paper on dispute procedures, the Department of Energy conceded that that was necessary and proposed the establishment of an independent subsidence advice centre. That proposal had the support of the Labour party and the Select Committee on Energy and it met the case put by the consortium of authorities liaising on subsidence and the needs of claimants.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem is compounded by the fact that, because of the many pit closures of the 1980s, all too often plans are not available to enable representatives of people who have suffered from subsidence to prove their case? All too often, British Coal has used that to blind people with science and keep them ignorant. Those people cannot pursue their claim because no plans are available for them to prove it.

Mr. Barron: My hon. Friend may be right. The Bill will ensure that plans are made available to householders, but we shall have to wait and see how that operates.

We very much regret the dropping of the proposal for independent advice centres. The Government implied in a letter to me last November that an improved arbitration system that is accessible and well publicised will preclude the need for an advice centre. Labour believes that both are necessary, otherwise the odds will always be stacked in favour of British Coal.

The biggest problem with mining subsidence is the six-year rule. The way in which British Coal operates that rule is causing confusion on top of confusion. Sadly, the Bill will only add to that confusion. We know from evidence submitted to the Select Committee on Energy and from letters to Members that it is seen by the public as the

device that British Coal uses to avoid liability when properties have been damaged. Many examples of that were given to the Select Committee. It was told that the problem with the six-year rule is that it can be triggered by British Coal at any time, that when new owners resubmit claims they are sometimes regarded by British Coal as out of time and that it is becoming increasingly common in long-running cases for British Coal to close the file on the ground that six years have expired. If a claimant had not submitted a claim to a land tribunal within that period, British Coal could stop the claimant's case in mid-flight.

British Coal states in its coal subsidence guidelines that it will accept claims within six years of damage occurring or when it would be "reasonable" for the claimant to have known that damage had occurred. That has been agreed with the Department and now the Government want Parliament to agree it.

British Coal appears confused about the operation of the rule, which it says has been operating voluntarily for a long time. Senior members of its staff told the Select Committee on Energy last year that it had paid damages in areas where mining ceased many years ago and even in areas where it could not remember mining having taken place. At one stage, they told the Committee that mining "may have been in 1845 or something like that".
If the damage is there to see, is obviously current damage and cannot be dissociated from mining, then that is an acceptable claim. But if that damage is there to be seen and has been there for many years, it will reject it as being out of time.

In answer to a later question, British Coal stated that if there is an immediate indication that the damage did not happen last week, last month or even six years ago, that is still within the six-year limit. Senior representatives of British Coal seem to be more interested in entertaining members of the Select Committee when they come to give evidence than in giving a coherent interpretation of the rule. No wonder people outside have doubts about its implementation of the six-year rule.

The Bill should offer compensation for mining subsidence rather than erect statutory obstacles for people to fall over or for British Coal to hide behind. If the six-year rule cannot be interpreted fairly nor be seen to be fair, it should be removed from the Bill, and we shall table an amendment to that effect at a later stage.

Mr. Ashby: Surely the Bill is to be applauded because it puts British Coal in the same position under common law on nuisance or tort as the rest of the country. One cannot ask for more than that.

Mr. Barron: That is the problem. The six-year rule has no geological basis. The hon. Gentleman, who I understand is a member of the legal profession, and perhaps still is although he is an hon. Member, points out that it is a question of common law. What powers are we giving British Coal under the six-year rule if it can answer questions rightly put by members of the Select Committee about compensation by talking about mining that may have occurred in 1845? That might sound quite extreme, but that was the answer of a senior member of its staff. The rule gives it licence to use that timetable against people who must prove subsidence damage.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): The hon. Gentleman cited several cases. Does he agree that in old mining areas, such as the one that I represent, it can take at least two or three years to establish whether mine shafts or old ventilation shafts are on the site? Much of the six years may be taken up resolving the precise location of workings.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The question of what happens with old workings is not dealt with in the Bill. I can foresee ground movement from coal mining being ruled out by British Coal using the weapon of the six-year rule.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To clear up any misunderstanding, may I point out that the date of the mining is irrelevant. The six years runs only from when the damage occurred or from when the householder might reasonably have noticed it.

Mr. Barron: In those circumstances, why do we need a six-year rule? British Coal's arguments show that it is not clear about exactly how the six-year rule operates. It even said that it would have to send out information to areas to ensure that they operated in the same way. There is nothing coherent about British Coal's interpretation of that rule. If it is used against people who are going to arbitration or before lands tribunals, we will not have done anything to settle the matter once and for all.

Mr. Illsley: I was a member of the Energy Select Committee which questioned British Coal on this subject. We heard different answers from two people—an area director and a member of British Coal based in London. It was put to them that there was considerable confusion about the six-year time limit. The Under-Secretary of State clearly stated that it is six years from the date when the claimant should have reasonably known that subsidence damage had occurred. The Select Committee was given evidence of claims that had been refused as recently as last year when British Coal alleged that, because of the length of time between the date of mining and the date of the claim, the damage could not possibly have been caused by mining subsidence. That should not have happened. In some cases, British Coal stated that, because the period was longer than six years, the claim should be refused. Much confusion has arisen.

Mr. Barron: My hon. Friend repeated exactly what was said last year to the Select Committee by the people who were executing the six-year rule.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): In the latter part of last year, a constituent who had purchased a house in Lowton in my constituency came to see me. Within months of the purchase, he had problems relating to subsidence. He submitted an application but was informed by British Coal that it was out of time as the previous owner had had some work done, but British Coal refused to give him information about that. I wrote requesting information so that an appropriate claim could be submitted. On 6 December, an area director told me:

"British Coal consider the detail of claims to be privileged information . . . I am sorry I am unable to be more helpful.

Yours faithfully".

British Coal refused to provide information to allow my constituent to consider whether his application was out of time, what work was carried out, when it was carried out and what subsidence was involved. With that one simple sentence, my constituent's rights were rejected by British

[Mr. Ian McCartney]

Coal. All that happened after the date on which British Coal published a document in consultation with the Government which said that that situation could not arise.

Mr. Barron: There will be opportunities later to obtain clarification on exactly what the six-year rule means and on exactly what can and cannot go to arbitration. I hope that we will be given answers to many of our questions by Report and Third Reading.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Members of the Select Committee have contributed to the debate. On a point of clarification, I should like to read the Select Committee's conclusions on this issue. The report states:

"We see no reason why mining subsidence damage should not be treated in a way analogous to other damage, and do not believe that the limitation period for subsidence damage claims should be any longer than for other sorts of claims. We therefore support the proposed clarification of the six-year rule".

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman may have gathered from my comments that I disagree with the Select Committee's findings on that issue. Its findings are not founded geologically. We shall see whether clause 3 is unamended by Third Reading. I suspect that in a few years' time, if the Bill is unamended, we shall be arguing once again about the need to clear up the issue of compensation for subsidence damage.

For the Bill to provide a system of repair and compensation that is as fast and fair as possible, it will need substantial amendment. We hope that we can make those improvements during proceedings on the Bill and we look forward to giving our wholehearted support at a later stage. We shall not vote against the Bill, but we register our disappointment at the Bill's omissions and weaknesses. We hope that the Bill will be toughened up so that we can deal with compensation problems and with the terrible mess that has occurred throughout the country because the current legislation has failed many people and British Coal.

7.45 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): The introduction of the Bill gives me a feeling of great personal satisfaction and will be warmly welcomed by my constituents and other people living in coal mining areas. To use a well-worn football cliché, we are over the moon.

Many people, encouraged by the Opposition, doubted the Government's commitment to legislate. On behalf of my constituents, I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy for fulfilling that Government promise by bringing forward this complex Bill. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who allocates time in the parliamentary timetable, must also share our appreciation. Both my right hon. Friends have been patient and understanding about my incessant demand for new legislation.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), who is the Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Department. It takes another PPS to know who really makes all the major descisions in a Government Department. I am sure that if my hon. Friend were not fulfilling his PPS's duty here today, he would be speaking on behalf of his constituents who share with mine the trials and tribulations resulting from mining subsidence damage.

The Bill will rectify the deficiencies of the Coal Mining (Subsidence) Act 1957 and the Coal Industry Act 1975 which, to all intents and purposes, left British Coal the offender and the judge and jury in deciding what repairs or cash compensation a claimant should receive for damage to his property. It was tough luck if one was a tenant. However, that unacceptable face of a nationalised company will soon be in the past, and not before time. The proposed changes will bring peace of mind for those who live in Britain's coalfields and will ensure, for the first time, that buying a home there will be an investment and not a depreciating liability.

North Nottinghamshire, including my constituency, is located on a raft of coal which has been mined for over 100 years, removing on average 17 million tonnes of coal a year, creating an unsupported void underground. In time, that situation causes trouble on the surface, and what trouble my constituents have had to face. As you would expect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, appeals for help and complaints against British coal have dwarfed all other constituency considerations.

During the past eight years, I have highlighted here and in the media many of the 2,500 cases on file and I do not intend to bore the House with repetition. Suffice it to say that my constituents' experiences and those of other hon. Members have played an important part in the drafting of the new Bill.

My constituents have asked me to express their thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for Energy—my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—for visiting Ollerton and Boughton recently to see for himself the scourge of mining subsidence on property and people. Seeing is believing and his visit there will stand my hon. Friend in good stead as he pilots this important Bill on to the statute book.

Supporting our campaign for change with professional expertise and holding discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and his officials were two important groups of people: COALS, the Consortium of Authorities Liaising on Subsidence, representing the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire local authorities, and the united industry working party, comprising the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union, the Building Societies Association, the Confederation of British Industry, the Association of British Insurers, the Law Society and the British Property Federation. The fact that we have such allies fighting our cause must make British Coal feel like Saddam Hussein—except that nobody is out to get British Coal.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): My hon. Friend has put his finger on it. The fact is that British Coal is a nationalised industry and does not need to be accountable to anybody. British Coal is judge and jury in its own cause. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the industry had been in the private sector we should not have had to put up with all this nonsense for so many years?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend has made his point clearly.

Mr. Allen McKay: As the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) knows, when the industry was run by private enterprise nobody paid out a penny.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member will remember that the last Labour Government introduced the Coal Industry Act 1975, which was supposed to put everything right. In fact, they made a mess of it and that is why we are having to tidy matters up.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): The hon. Gentleman has made a valid point. British Coal is, indeed, a nationalised industry, but I was under the impression that nationalised industries were accountable to the Government. For three years, the Government have been reluctant to introduce legislation to make this nationalised industry accountable in a way that is acceptable to our constituents.

Mr. Stewart: We are in trouble today because those who nationalised the concern could run neither a Government nor a private industry.

Unlike Saddam Hussein, nobody is out to get British Coal. We want only to ensure that claimants receive fair and just treatment—not a penny more and not a penny less than is required to restore their property to its original condition, with compensation being paid for disturbance—and that the provisions apply equally to tenants of rented accommodation who, until now, have been treated as chattels. I am delighted that those matters have been addressed in the Bill, which will also improve standards of repair and set clearer time limits for making a claim. The limit will be six years from the time when a claimant could reasonably suspect damage and not, as British Coal would have us believe, six years from the time when the mining took place.

Emphasis will be placed on repairs rather than cash compensation, so as to maintain the housing stock. Where cash is paid, the compensation schedule must become a public document and must be registered on property title deeds. The reimbursement in full of a claimant's reasonable expenses is another welcome step, although the complexity of the claims procedure demonstrates the need for an independent subsidence advice centre, and that matter will need to be dealt with in Committee.

It may surprise the House to learn that the first notification that my constituents have that mining is taking place in their area comes with visible signs of damage to their homes. British Coal has recently committed itself to introducing a pilot scheme for the notification of individual householders. That must become a permanent feature, and notice must be given at least one year before work commences.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does not the hon. Gentleman feel that there will be a serious problem of blight on property in areas where notification has been given, because, even with the advanced technology now available to engineers, it is impossible to predict exactly what will happen to the strata that lie between a house and the mine beneath it? What will the Bill do to overcome the threat of blight?

Mr. Stewart: I do not think that the Bill will overcome the problem of mining subsidence damage, because it is a fact of life. If one takes the coal out, there will be damage. We merely seek to ensure that those whose property is blighted will get a fair deal.

Mr. Lofthouse: The hon. Gentleman is not addressing the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells). Subsidence is a major problem in mining areas and it is an expensive one. Properties that may not themselves have been damaged by subsidence may, nevertheless, become unsaleable. Once it is known that mining is taking place in an area and once there is evidence of mining subsidence affecting certain properties, even properties that have not been damaged are blighted and can become unsaleable. There is nothing in the Bill to protect people from that.

Mr. Stewart: I have been trying to address myself to the Bill and to highlight its deficiencies and the matters that we wish to discuss in Committee. The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to one of the matters on which we shall have to concentrate to ensure that those whose properties suffer damage will get fair and reasonable treatment.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Perhaps I can assist my hon. Friend. If the Bill does what the Government and all of us hope that it will do, which is to provide an efficient and speedy remedy for those whose properties suffer from the effects of coal mining subsidence, the problem of blight, to which the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) rightfully refers, could be severely reduced. At least people will know that a swift and efficient procedure exists for solving the problems of subsidence.

Mr. Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend for answering the question of the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse)—probably in greater detail than I could have done.

Another criticism of British Coal that will have been addressed in Committee relates to the effect of stop notices, especially on family life. Such notices preclude repairs being carried out on damaged property until all mining in the area has been completed. That sounds reasonable to most people, but not to those who have to wait years for repairs to be carried out without a penny compensation being offered.

British justice is recognised internationally as second to none but not in relation to disputed mining subsidence claims. The 1957 and 1975 Acts intended the Lands Tribunal to be the first arbiter, but, alas, experience has shown that to be slow, complex and—where professionals have acted on behalf of claimants—expensive beyond comprehension. Figures of £100,000 were not uncommon.

The House will recall that during the debate introduced on 16 June 1989 by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), I told the House that two of my constituents, Mr. Goodman of Hucknall and Mr. Lancaster of Bilsthorpe, had referred their disputed claims to the Lands Tribunal and I am sure that all hon. Members will want to know the outcome. There is still no decision. The cases drag on and on, with British Coal's solicitors using every legal device in the book to delay and to confuse and intimidate my constituents.

Above all else, the Bill must ensure that we have a new disputes procedure to provide a cheaper, quicker and less formal way of resolving disputes. A local adjudication system by appropriately qualified experts or a mining ombudsman would suffice. However, we cannot allow an arbitration scheme such as that introduced in January this year by British Coal. It appeared to meet our wishes, but the small print revealed that British Coal had a right to refuse referrals if it wished. Heads, British Coal wins; tails,

[Mr. Stewart]

the claimant loses. When I submit a case to the local or national ombudsman, it is not at the discretion of the local authority or the Government. The Standing Committee that examines the Bill must ensure that a truly independent referral system for arbitration is established.

Many of the Bill's 52 clauses are consolidation measures and require no comment. In order to allow other hon. Members to contribute to the debate, I have highlighted some of the issues that concern me and my constituents. However, when discussing this legislation, we must not forget—I was surprised that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) did not refer to this—that a balance must be maintained between the needs of the coal industry, which is Nottinghamshire's largest employer, and the consequences of mining activity. If we do not maintain that balance, miners' jobs could be threatened.

The Bill will clarify, revise and consolidate existing law. My constituents' hope for the future starts with supporting the Bill.

8 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I want to thank and congratulate sincerely all the organisations that have spent so much time considering the problem and injustices of coal mining subsidence damage in the coalfield areas. In particular, I want to pay tribute to the Coalfield Communities Campaign, which has worked stoutly towards finding a solution to that problem. I want also to thank members of the united industries working party which has tried to pull together the other organisations in an attempt to put pressure on the Government to find a solution. Above all, I pay tribute to the Consortium Of Authorities Liaising on Subsidence—or COALS—which is at the forefront of the campaign to sort out the injustice of coal mining subsidence damage, particularly in the coalfield areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

As hon. Members will know, COALS comprises 10 local authorities in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, They are the district councils of Amber Valley, Ashfield, Bolsover, Bassetlaw, Chesterfield, Gedling, Newark and Sherwood, and Mansfield and also the county councils of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, both of which are deeply involved.

I am extremely grateful to the executive committee of COALS which meets regularly and tries to organise and co-ordinate activity in an attempt to solve the problem. In particular tonight, I want to pay tribute to Mr. Brian Lewin, who was the co-ordinator of the COALS secretariat. Unfortunately, because of stress and ill health, he has had to announce his retirement. Some of that stress undoubtedly stemmed from the pressure on him throughout the campaign, which has lasted many years. All Opposition Members and some Conservative Members from that part of the country will wish Mr. Lewin well in his retirement and hope that his ill health will not last for too long.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), I have no intention of opposing the Bill's passage to Standing Committee. I sincerely hope that it will be noted that I would like to serve on that Committee. However, along with other hopeful Members, I await the outcome of the democratic process of the normal channels in this place.

I want to put down some markers for the Government to consider. I welcome the Bill, but much of what it contains is inadequate or needs changing substantially before the Bill can reach the statute book. My worries about the Bill are shared by COALS, and it might help the House if I try to deal with those worries separately.

My first concern is about arbitration. According to the explanatory memorandum, clause 41 sets out a method that allows the Secretary of State to direct British Coal "to make and submit for his approval a scheme for the determination of disputes by arbitration."
In other words, it is not a matter of "there shall be", but "there may be", and I suggest that it will apply only if British Coal agrees. That is unsatisfactory. In that respect, it is not what the proposal states but what it does not state that is worrying.

Clause 41 does not specify the time that the Secretary of State will allow British Coal to draw up such a scheme. That is important when we recall the attitude of the new chairman of British Coal to privatisation of the coal industry.

The Bill does not direct or compel the Secretary of State to give directions about the terms of the arbitration scheme. It simply says that he "may" direct. That leaves it open to interpretation or negotiation by British Coal. As hon. Members who represent coalfield areas will be aware, leaving matters to negotiations with British Coal or for British Coal to interpret has caused many of the problems that have led the Government to introduce this legislation.

Clause 41 contains no specific reference to independent arbitration; nor does it state how such an arbitration body would be appointed or from where its members would come. That is left to the discretion of British Coal and the Secretary of State. Bearing in mind the history of British Coal on that matter, that is perhaps not a wise decision.

Some of my colleagues have already referred to advice centres. Clause 41(2) provides that the Secretary of State "may" direct that a person may be appointed under the arbitration scheme to advise about it. That does not meet the criteria for advice centres as discussed previously in this place. Instead, it points to a role for the person concerned as that of a public relations officer for the arbitration scheme. That is not quite the same thing.

Clause 41 also does not provide for a subsidence advisory officer or a real advice scheme. Nor does it provide for any funding for an advice scheme or pre-funding for professional advice for claimants. Therefore, clause 41 needs filling substantially before it reaches the statute book. A readily accessible, local, independent advice centre is required to assist claimants through the maze of claim rights and procedures.

An effective independent service would also expedite the processing of claims and would minimise the number of cases that would have to be referred to complaints or arbitration processes. That would leave British Coal to do what it is supposed to do—to produce coal at a reasonable price. Its job is not to arbitrate or to be in the courts. Its job is certainly not to work against the coalfield communities to try to stop people rightfully getting repairs to their homes or property.

I want now to consider blight. The Minister is aware that clauses 10 and 11 provide for depreciation payments in lieu in certain circumstances. Schedule 1 sets out the method of determining the basis of voluntary depreciation payments. The discretion or obligation to buy in is required, although that is not covered by the Bill. That

would enable owners to have their properties bought out at the market price or to receive a depreciation payment for the loss of value of their property when any damage occurred.

I want now to consider deferment of repairs, or stop notices as they are more commonly known. My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley has already referred to them. The Minister is aware that clause 16 provides for the review of stop notices and for the provision of emergency and excepted works. That would greatly worsen the situation, as it would allow, even with review, a stop notice or time limit imposition to be extended indefinitely by British Coal, thereby allowing it to delay settlement of claims or to prevent interim payments from being paid to claimants. That proposal would make the position considerably worse than it is at the moment.

We want strict time limits to protect property owners. That should be done together with the introduction of an obligatory buy-out mechanism on request if a stop notice and consequential blight has been current beyond 12 months. If a person has been left in such a situation in his own home for that time, it is reasonable that he should have every right to make such a request.

The next matter is incidental costs, a topic on which the Bill is totally silent. In my opinion and in that of COALS, not only damage caused by subsidence but the incidental costs of the remedy should be reimbursed. For instance, in a coalfield area, if a road must be closed because of subsidence damage, as often happens in Nottinghamshire, the cost of providing an alternative route, signs, barriers and additional road safety requirements should be met by British Coal, not by the local authority.

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) knows that there are additional costs in respect of businesses. During repair work, a shop may conduct no business. It is not right for British Coal to be able to get around that and stop proper compensation being paid to that business. On occasions, businesses close because of such pressure.

Clause 44 provides for notices to property owners in respect of proposed mining operations. It seems to limit the requirements of such notices to the judgment of British Coal—that is to say, land that British Coal feels might be affected. Experience in my constituency is that British Coal always states:

"Because of new mining techniques, land won't be disturbed."

How many times have hon. Members from coalfield areas heard that? That is a despicable attempt to impose on an area a system whereby people do not even need to be notified of what is happening in their area.

The Bill should stipulate requirements based not on self-judgment criteria but on fact. Also, under clause 44, the working of licences granted to private operators before 1 May 1991 does not seem to be covered. The Minister might want also to examine that matter, in particular in the light of his party's intentions on coal privatisation.

Clause 9 provides for obligatory payments in lieu to highway authorities and to local authorities that have a duty to carry out remedial works in connection with the maintenance of public services unless the Secretary of State disapproves. The Secretary of State's veto on that matter is unnecessary, as well as extremely undemocratic. The Bill is supposed to be about sorting out British Coal, not local authorities. If that criterion is followed, the Bill should read, "Local authorities should be paid in lieu for any damage to their property or property over which they have default powers if local authorities request such a payment."

The next issue is outstanding claims. Clause 51 and schedule 7 are outrageous and need to be amended. For instance, schedule 7 specifically excludes previous claims from the new procedures unless the claimant withdraws the claim and resubmits it. What about the 33,500 claims that were accepted by a previous Minister from the COALS area? The hon. Member for Sherwood was part of a delegation, when the then Minister accepted all the claims honestly and fairly. All claims had been submitted on time and were accepted by the relevant Minister of the Crown. If the proposed scheme is undertaken, it will jeopardise all those claims. The Minister should think about that matter. If many people withdraw their claims and then resubmit them, British Coal will seek to rule them out of time. The Minister must consider those issues tonight and in Committee.

I now refer to the protection of future purchasers. The Bill is inadequate to protect the home owner from the problem of subsidence damage. For example, clause 46 states only:

"The Secretary of State may make regulations requiring the Corporation . . . to provide . . . information".

Even with the involvement of the Law Society, information will be available only if British Coal agrees. Such a system is totally useless, and the clause needs to be much more specific. It must provide for a local public register that may be inspected by anyone seeking information, perhaps before purchasing a property. Hon. Members have heard of many constituents being denied the right to know what has happened in respect of coal mining subsidence damage.

At the moment, the register is held by British Coal. If people wish to find out information about a property which they are interested in making their home, they must pay a small amount for it. For that, all they get are one or two sentences. If they want more information, they must pay a substantially larger sum, but that information is still not specific—just enough information to enable a building society to consider lending money on the property.

People who are about to make the biggest investment of their lives have the right to know whether something has happened to the home and whether repairs must be carried out. It is just not good enough for hon. Members to consider introducing a law that would not give the vast majority of people such a right. As legislators, we should have every responsibility to protect our constituents.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I support the hon. Gentleman's point. In fact, I gave evidence to the Waddilove committee. Most hon. Members have had constituency cases in which subsidence has occurred. People have spent money on repairs that have turned out to be only superficial, and a subsequent purchaser then finds that not only does he have subsidence but no money to repair it. It is essential to have some provision to ensure an entry on the deeds or a record in the Lands Tribunal, so that people will know whether damage has been incurred.

Mr. Meale: Virtually all hon. Members have experienced exactly the same thing. I should like not something extravagant or unusual but something that will enable people to be informed about the largest investment

[Mr. Meale]

in their lives. I refer to information about past claims and any remedial works to the property that they seek to purchase.

Such a register should be kept by the local authority, not by British Coal. The Bill should impose a time limit not upon home owners but upon British Coal to compile such a register and to maintain it. That is a basic right.

The Minister will be aware that clause 3 makes a convuluted reference to the time limit for awarding damages, which is six years. Even an examination of the six subsections of clause 3 leaves many matters in doubt and open to misunderstanding—for example, whether it is reasonable to expect claimants to seek expert advice on facts which they have not observed themselves. In line with the COALS organisation, I contend that no time limit for restriction should apply.

If the Minister doubts that we can afford such an approach, he should examine the finances already set aside for compensation for subsidence which have accumulated by way of an additional cost added to every tonne of coal produced from British coalfields since the 1950s. According to the latest estimates, even taking into account the moneys used for repair, the sum is well in excess of £300 million. If the Government and British Coal can shut pits by this method of coal economics, surely they can set money aside and consider legislation to introduce a system of proper repair for home owners in the coalfields areas.

There are many things yet to be said on the proposals in the Bill. I sincerly trust and hope that in Committee we do not simply have a snow job but see a real attempt to sort out the terrible injustices which people in the coalfields have faced in their homes.

8.20 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): There is a great wealth of agreement among hon. Members on both sides of the House about the Bill. We all welcome it. Looking around the Chamber I see many faces that were here in 1983 when I came into the House. All those hon. Members have fought hard for the implementation of the Waddilove report and have been involved in various subsidence claims and the difficulties which arose from them.

Subsidence damage is one of the greatest injustices that we have suffered, especially in the midlands, the north and Scotland. For years on end, the National Coal Board, as it then was, mined under houses and caused subsidence. Communities and small villages suffered as a result.

Not many people realise that in mining areas there is a high proportion of owner occupation. In villages people's whose greatest investment was their home found that their very occupation, or that of their brothers or close relatives, was causing damage to their major asset. Those people were in a terrible dilemma. The major employer in the area was the Coal Board. Time and time again I have heard people say, "We cannot fight the Coal Board", or, "We do not want to fight the Coal Board." They said that it was not right because, after all, their husband or brother was employed by the Coal Board. So people suffered in silence.

We must remember a parallel factor. One of the greatest industries in Britain was the coal industry. It was all-powerful.

Mr. Barron: Yes.

Mr. Ashby: I do not mean it in the sense that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) thinks. The Coal Board was a powerful body in midlands areas. It was the largest employer. It pervaded everything. It was a source of income and the National Union of Mineworkers was one of the great unions. Between them, the Coal Board and the NUM seemed to control the very lives of the people.

The Coal Board had a gung-ho approach to its mining activities and the subsidence which was subsequently caused. So often it approached subsidence damage in a relaxed and easy manner, caring little for the victims. This Bill changes that. It gives people rights whereas before compensation was voluntary.

The process which led to the Bill began some time ago. The matters which I have mentioned were only too obvious in 1983 when I first represented Leicestershire, North-West. In 1984 we had the Waddilove report and in 1987 the Government's response. The approach to subsidence of the National Coal Board, later British Coal, almost visibly changed. There was a softening of approach. The board thought more about the victims and tried to help more. Much of what Waddilove recommended has been implemented voluntarily by British Coal over the years. Of course, that is not enough.

People have rights to compensation. We must consider what happened. People bought their houses and lived happily until suddenly they found that someone had mined underneath, causing a nuisance. Their only resort was to voluntary help from British Coal in providing remedies. That was not good enough. People must have a right to compensation. When people buy property they have rights. They have the right not to have a nuisance on their property, or a tort—to mention the legal aspect. The Bill protects those rights.

We can argue about many of the details of the Bill in Committee and I suspect that both Conservative and Opposition Members will give details of cases and we shall have a great deal of discussion. But it will be to one end because we are together in seeking to rectify a great injustice which stretches back over the ages.

I am grateful that the Bill has been introduced because I and other hon. Members have approached successive Secretaries of State and begged them to make the Waddilove recommendations into a Bill. We were often told that there was not time or that the legislation could be combined with a Bill to privatise British Coal. I look forward to the day when British Coal is privatised, but it is no good seeking privatisation unless the foundation for it is in place. British Coal must know the rules and the laws within which it will have to work. It is absolutely essential that it should know exactly what its responsibilities will be in respect of subsidence.

It would be wrong for any legislation on subsidence to be incorporated in any other Bill on British Coal. The subsidence legislation stands on its own, as I have argued for years. I was delighted that, within a week of coming to office, the present Secretary of State for Energy told me that he agreed that there should be a separate Bill to deal with subsidence. I am delighted that we have that Bill.

I take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), who spoke about the need for the Bill and the balance between the Bill and jobs in British Coal. I do not seek that balance. People have rights. It is not a question of balance. It is not a question of jobs. It is

a question of rights and British Coal's duty to work to those rights. I do not seek any compromise or balance in respect of those rights. That would be wrong.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Perhaps I did not quite understand my hon. Friend. British Coal has to decide where to mine, and if the only place left to mine is under a town it will not mine there if the cost is too great and will close the colliery. The hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) remembers that happening to a colliery in his constituency.

Mr. Ashby: I am grateful for that clarification. In that case the situation remains as I said. British Coal will mine, subject to the law, knowing full well what the results of mining will be, and that is as it should be.

Mr. Meale: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider the matter which the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) raised. In the instance he mentioned, when a colliery was closed it was suggested that its closure had been influenced by my attitude to coal mining subsidence in my constituency. Subsequently, that was proved to be totally false because none of the 35 claims which I have made on behalf of people in the area of that mine has been settled by British Coal. The hon. Member for Sherwood knows that perfectly well. Sometimes that method is used by British Coal to try to blackmail certain Members of Parliament so that they will not raise these issues on behalf of their constituents.

Mr. Ashby: Subsidence is one of the ongoing costs that British Coal has to meet. When it decides whether it can mine a certain area it has to take into account the fact that claims will be made against it and will estimate the amount and decide whether it is profitable to mine that area at that time. In 50 or 100 years time, when the price of coal has gone up, it might be profitable to do so. British Coal must mine profitably and that is decided by the time and ease of getting coal out of the ground and the ongoing costs of subsidence.

As so many hon. Members wish to speak I shall not go into the details of the Bill. We shall have time to consider them in Committee. However I must mention one or two aspects of the Bill. When it is known that an area is to be mined a notice will be sent to every household, and I am pleased, as that is essential. However, I think that that notice should include advice to the householder to have an independent survey carried out with costs borne by British Coal. So many of the wrangles that take place over the degree of damage to a property are due to the fact that no one knows what state the property was in before mining started, and a survey would resolve many disputes. If British Coal began to mine in my area and there was a high probability that my property would be damaged, I should be entitled to a free survey, paid for by British Coal.

The Bill provides that British Coal pays for the cost of the survey only if a claim is successful. However, everyone in an area where coal is to be mined should be entitled to a free survey, paid for by British Coal, as that would be cheaper in the long run and would resolve many disputes.

Another important aspect of the Bill is the six-year limit and the burden of proof, and I hope that the hon. Member for Rother Valley will consider that carefully because it is perfect as it is and should not be changed. I believe in justice and I believe that any change would result in injustice. The Bill follows common law, which is based upon years of experience that we cannot throw away. The six-year period will come into operation only once damage becomes apparent or should reasonably have become apparent, which is virtually the same. I hope that the hon. Member for Rother Valley will not consider the six-year period on its own because the Bill also reverses the burden of proof, placing it upon British Coal. In that respect the Bill does not follow the common law, which places the burden of proof upon the claimant. Therefore, if one's property is damaged, one will put in a notice and British Coal will have to prove that damage has not occurred because of its mining. That is the most just way to deal with subsidence and will work extremely well.

Mr. Barron: Surely, if the six-year rule is changed or abolished, it does not mean that the burden of proof need change.

Mr. Ashby: If one has justice, it must be justice for all. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion is too summary. British Coal is entitled to some justice, as well as claimants against it—justice must have its scales evenly balanced.

Six years is a reasonable time, especially when the burden of proof is taken into account. As a result, cases in which there was mining 20 or 40 years ago, or even at the beginning of the century, and maps have been lost, would be on a different footing. The very fact that mining had taken place in an area coupled with the burden of proof would mean that British Coal would have to prove that subsidence had not occurred as a result of mining activities. That is a heavy burden for British Coal because it will have great difficulty in disproving it. I believe that that aspect of the Bill will help in all those difficult cases that hon. Members have experienced. That is the crux of the Bill.

Mr. Meale: When the hon. Gentleman talks about fairness and justice—which are quite different—he implies that anyone can get justice because of the time limit. That is nonsense. Even with the proposals contained in the Bill, people can get justice only if they have enough money to pursue British Coal in the courts and they cannot do that when a time limit is imposed.

Mr. Ashby: That is an unfair comment for a number of reasons. First, the Bill provides for an informed form of tribunal. Secondly, if we get together in Committee and table an amendment which grants the right of a free survey of property in mining areas it will make a big difference. Perhaps it is because I am a lawyer that I realise that the shift in the burden of proof is an overwhelming change. The fact that the burden of proof is now placed upon the mining company protects the poorest people in a way that they have never been protected before. That protection is not absolute but it cannot be lightly set aside.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The hon. Gentleman has overlooked one matter and, bearing in mind his work, representing people in court, I am surprised by that. The Minister made it clear at the beginning of the debate that British Coal would decide whether anyone had a claim. After that, people would have to go to the Secretary of State. What does the hon. Gentleman think about that aspect and how will that affect winning?

Mr. Ashby: Any action taken by the board will be subject to the law contained in the Bill, so the burden of proof will have to be shown. The board must direct itself

[Mr. Ashby]

—and in doing so, it must ask itself whether it is unlikely, less likely, or improbable that the damage was caused by subsidence.

Mr. Allen McKay *rose*——

Mr. Ashby: I have already given way on a number of occasions, and it is unfair of the hon. Gentleman to expect me to do so again. I had intended to speak only briefly, and I seem to have spoken for much longer than I planned. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can make his point in his own speech.

Other disputes have arisen out of the quality of work done in the past, which aspect the Bill also addresses. Often, British Coal employed shoddy workers to correct the effects of subsidence. In future, owners will be able to make their own choice, which should right what they view as an injustice. Presumably, owners will obtain three estimates from contractors of their own choice to satisfy British Coal.

As to the provision of alternative housing, the Bill aims at rehousing those affected in comparable accommodation. There will be no question of expecting them to live in a caravan at the bottom of the garden, because they will be entitled to housing of a like quality—in the same way as they will be entitled to a standard of workmanship that will restore their property to its previous condition, or as near to it as possible.

Owners will also be entitled to compensation for loss of value if, for example, the property develops a permanent tilt. The Bill will, and can, provide for such eventualities.

There is still some work to do on the Bill, but it is an admirable and long-sought-after measure, and is excellent in the changes that it makes in respect of the burden of proof and the qualifying time limit. I know that it will be much welcomed in my constituency.

8.42 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I and my party welcome the Bill, and so will many of my constituents, but we need to know how it will affect certain categories of owners, and we want to be clear that they will have access to tribunal procedures of a kind not guaranteed under British Coal's existing voluntary arrangements. We want to be certain also that the advantage provided by the shift in the burden of proof to which the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) referred will be enjoyed by claimants. As yet, that is far from clear.

The recently introduced and, as yet, untried arbitration procedure does not meet desirable standards, not least because of restrictions on access. It also requires payment of a fairly hefty registration fee, before a claim can be pursued. The Minister must make it clear whether the Bill's enabling procedures under which he can approve a scheme will be used—and used quickly—to establish one to which all can have access without incurring unreasonable cost and a veto being placed on their access by British Coal.

Right hon. and hon. Members have received a number of representations that focus on the use of the word "may" in the Bill. They will know from their dealings with legislation over the years that that is the normal formula. It would be the same if the Minister decided, here and now, to introduce the procedures from the day that the Act came into force. However, the same formula can be used by Ministers to delay enacting new provisions. The House needs an indication of the Government's intention in that regard.

I want to cite two cases from my constituency that illustrate the problems that can arise. They both concern properties in Swarland, near Alnwick, and illustrate how easily British Coal can get things wrong—and how unwilling it is to accept liability when it does. In both cases, the owners are pensioners—people who have reached an age at which they do not want to be worried by the prospect of substantial repairs to their property and having to encounter complicated compensation procedures.

In the first case, the pensioner concerned, having decided to purchase a property in Swarland, paid for a National Coal Board survey to determine whether any mining had been undertaken nearby. The survey clearly states: "No recorded past mining." In fact, that was nonsense—as anyone who knew the area could testify. There had been extensive mining in the area in question, from Whittle colliery.

Subsequent correspondence made it clear that the mining report was wrong. A letter I received from British Coal states:

"British Coal did indeed issue a mining report on this property on 8 January 1987 stating that there was no recorded past mining. I have discussed this report with the Corporation's Group Surveyor, who issues mining reports, and it would appear that the mining report was in error. There have been coal workings to the north of the property . . . and to the south of the property . . . The property in fact sits in a pillar of coal between these two workings. The Group Surveyor informs me that all settlement from these workings would have ceased by late 1985."

That letter goes on to deny any liability on British Coal's part for damage to the property concerned. The furthest that it went by way of making amends for that error was that the writer of the letter stated:

"I can only apologise on behalf of British Coal for the error in the mining report, and, with hindsight, an apology in my letter of 17 November 1990 would have been courteous." That was the full extent of British Coal's apology for having misled a house purchaser by claiming that there had been no mining in the vicinity of the property in question. I have referred that case to the chairman of British Coal, and I hope that it can be pursued under the new arbitration procedures. However, it has yet to be made clear whether they will be adequate to deal with such cases.

I found myself dealing simultaneously with another case, involving a property in the same road—Park road, Swarland—which had subsided 14 inches as a result of mining activity. The house owner was rather late in pursuing her case, because at the time that the damage became known her husband was dying. It is understandable that, while she had to endure that miserable and traumatic experience, she could not give her attention to the subsidence affecting her property.

British Coal again denied liability for the damage, and sent that lady a plan in order to prove that her property could not be affected by subsidence. It showed, or purported to show, that her house stood on the pillar of coal between two mined areas. Not even that is conclusive proof of invulnerability, because there is extensive evidence of damage spreading at surface level on either side of mining activity, which takes the form of an angle of settlement that affects a significant adjacent area. In any

event, the plan submitted by British Coal turned out to be the plan of my other constituent's house—the house involved in the first case that I have described. British Coal had picked up the wrong plan, and sent it to one of my constituents to justify denying all liability. I should like to see that case proceed through the arbitration system.

When the Minister winds up the debate, I should like him to state how soon the arbitration procedure will be set up and whether it will be able to deal with cases of damage that occurred, or were noticed, in 1985. I should like him to say whether the arbitration procedure will be able to consider the sort of incompetence that I have just outlined.

Obviously, there are other matters that will be considered as the Bill proceeds. At some stage, perhaps the Minister will enlighten us about what will happen if there is any substantial privatisation of British Coal. I assume that all private mining activity taking place under licence from British Coal will be dealt with, under the Bill, in exactly the same way as British Coal's own mining. The district about which I am talking is now being mined under licence from British Coal, as a licensed private mine. Should any further subsidence occur, I assume that it will be treated in the same way.

The issue has caused great agitation and vexation for a long time, and it will continue to do so if the Bill's declared and publicised advantages are not properly available to those most affected and aggrieved. I have given the Minister two examples. It would be very bad if people who have suffered as my constituents have do not benefit from the Bill. They are the sort of people whose pressure, agitation and legitimate concern have formed the basis of the Bill.

8.52 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Like the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I shall refer specifically to constituency cases that highlight the problems that we who represent constituencies with a history of coal mining regularly face. It is not generally remembered that Members of Parliament like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I represent former mining constituencies. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment also represents a district that has been partly mined. At various times, 95 per cent. of my constituency has been mined, and problems associated with coal mining subsidence are common.

The two cases that I wish to raise, and by which I believe the Bill will be judged by myself and hon. Members with constituencies close to the eastern Avon district, are fairly typical. They stem from the fact that, unlike the constituencies of many of the hon. Members who have already spoken, they occurred in districts where coal mining ceased 20 or 30 years ago. In many of the cases, the mining records are not readily available. The first problem facing any constituent is the long-drawn-out process of trying to establish whether the subsidence or cracking has anything to do with a coal mine. The arguments go round and round, and backwards and forwards, between the local council, the water board and British Coal.

The number of cases of subsidence that I, as a Member of Parliament, face has increased in the past year or so. I do not believe that is because people are becoming more money-oriented. People I meet in the street, who understand the problem much better than I do, say that the substantially dry summers in recent years have altered the balance of the land. In addition, in my constituency —this may be true in the constituencies of many other hon. Members—there has been substantial infilling and development. The infilling causes problems that are supposed to be related to watercourses. When infilling takes place over former mine shafts, it alters the watercourses and the flow of the water table, so it impacts on other constituents' properties.

I have constituents in Woodyleaze drive, Hanham, who, at the height of last summer, had lawns like bogs, on which Professor Bellamy would have been pleased to walk. In what was supposed to be the driest year for many a decade, we could stand on the lawn and sway from side to side. We took buckets full of water out of the trenches, which filled up immediately. After many months of study of that case, the latest information is that water is coming from two different sources, one of which is—it was disclosed last week—former coal mines. That information has been made available after a long period of research by all the experts in the district.

The constituents have to deal with a Coal Board office that was previously in south Wales, but is now in Derbyshire. The office was moved to Derbyshire because of the decline in coal mining in south Wales. I think that the constituents of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) may face the same problem. It adds to the complications and drawn-out process that constituents face.

At present, the residents of one of the houses, Mr. and Mrs. Hann, are pursuing their case with great determination, but as yet none of the neighbours has filed a claim. However, it is likely that, when the Hanns' case is resolved, other neighbours may have cause to file claims. I should like the Minister to clarify whether that period will form part of the six years. Do the six years start from the time at which the Hanns started pursuing their case or when damage began to be apparent in the neighbours' houses, as it is likely to be? With respect to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), I accept that the burden of proof has changed, but it is important to make clear at what point the six years will start.

The second case is located at the opposite end of my constituency, where residents of Stanley Park road have just started to face problems associated with subsidence. At present, the resident in 9 Stanley Park road believes that the subsidence is being caused by mining. The mine shafts appear to be on a vacant property where Nos. 3 and 5 would be. But there is substantial argument about whether a ventilation shaft, mine shaft or some other form of previous working is causing the subsidence. The resident at No. 7 has not yet identified any damage to his property that has been caused by the subsidence.

If the resident at No. 7 were to suffer subsidence later, would the six-year period start from the date at which the resident at No. 9 identified the subsidence? It is believed that the property at No. 7 is moving slightly and causing difficulties with other properties. Or does the six-year period start from the date at which any damage becomes obvious at No.7? That is a particularly important aspect, because the cases may involve pensioners who may not be specifically interested in the problem to begin with, due to other family reasons or their own nature, and do not wish to register the problem at that stage.

Would a developer of the site of Nos. 5 and 3 Stanley Park road, currently pursing an argument with British

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Coal about whether there is subsidence caused by previous mine workings, have the right to claim compensation because of the extra work that he will have to do on a property which was not previously identified as standing on mine workings? As a result of the expert efforts of Mr. Cornwell and some of his colleagues, it has been established that workings had probably been there before; however, when the developer bought the site on which he wished to build flats, it was not evident from any map available to the Coal Board that such workings were present.

Wherever coal workings have previously arisen, our constituents will face difficulties. I think that, in principle, the Bill is going in the right direction, but before I can support it my constituents and I would like certain points to be clarified.

8.59 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): In his concluding remarks, the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) drew attention to the balance that has had to be struck between the needs of a mining community that faces various problems and the needs of an industry that generates jobs. I understood the point that he was making and the dilemmas that he described; they allow me, briefly at least, to present the Bill in the context of the south Wales mining industry.

It is a gloomy, nostalgic reflection that this could be one of the last debates on a Bill about coal mining in which any Welsh Member can claim that he represents a coal-producing community. Astonishingly, the House now contains only four Welsh Members who fall into that category. At one time, the industry provided more than 200,000 jobs in the south Wales coal field, and produced more than 200,000 tonnes of coal; now we are down to 2,000 jobs and about 2,000 tonnes of deep-mined coal. Since 1985, the number of jobs has fallen from 27,000 to 2,000.

Along with that has come a sea change in attitudes to jobs and industry. The Bill reminds us of the high price that has had to be paid for the vital requirements of the coal industry—the health of the mining communities, for instance. In my community, pits have closed and jobs have disappeared, but there is still a generation of pneumoconiotic miners. Safety has also helped to pay the price: I need say no more than that I represent the pit village of Aberfan. The environment, too, has suffered: generations of communities have put up with tip waste, noise, nuisance, dust and, indeed, subsidence to preserve jobs and allow them to be created so that the industry can survive.

At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) described, quite effectively, the attitudes of the mining communities to British Coal. He said that they were relaxed, but I think that that is the wrong word: they were, rather, ambivalent about the dilemmas involved in relation to jobs and the development of industry, as against the impact that such development would have on them. There was a reason for that. For generations, communities such as the one that I am proud to represent put up with so much because they had what the Government may see as a rather cockeyed view of economics: they actually believed that the physical economy was important. They felt that making things—producing things; extracting valuable physical assets—constituted a worthwhile, important contribution to the nation's wealth. Those attitudes are changing; they have, in any event, been changed by the closure of pits and the destruction of jobs.

A couple of weeks ago, I attended a meeting in Edwardsville, Treharris, in my local community. The meeting was packed to overflowing: householders were standing out in the street. That meeting was about the serious subsidence problem in the area. After the meeting, some of us wondered how, in the 1990s, British Coal would ever obtain permission to sink a deep mine of any kind or conduct any form of extraction in such a village —or, indeed, any other village. That pit was sunk more than 100 years ago. Does any hon. Member on either side of the House believe that any such proposal would not provoke a massive residential reaction?

The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West spoke about the shifting burden of proof and the rights in the Bill. One right remains unchallengeable, because British Coal now and in the future will have an absolute and total right to undermine pit communities, villages and homes, and that right will probably have to remain. It will be amazing if in the 1990s British Coal receives permission for works that will lead to the continuation of the undermining of communities and neighbourhoods.

It is important to recall the nature and character of the industry which in my community is down to one pit. I spoke about the community of Edwardsville, Treharris, where subsidence has affected not only homes but the swimming pool and the local school. That is just a mile and half from our valley. One can imagine the feelings and worries of residents in that area. The problems will now be lessened because British Coal has suddenly decided to close the deep navigation pit in Treharris. However, after the pit is closed the problems will remain.

As many hon. Members have said, subsidence does not go away when British Coal goes away and the pit closes. The communities that I have described and to which I belong are not yuppie communities. Basically, they consist of two generations of home owners. Many members of the older generation worked in the industry or have strong connections with it. Those people are proud of their homes and have transformed them through repair and improvement grants. Those terraced houses in which they live have been transformed into valuable and precious homes.

The younger generation live in properties which form the first rung on the ladder of home ownership. By south-east standards their mortgages are small, but they are significant in relation to the small incomes and they are often linked to improvement loans. We must judge the value of the Bill in the light of the worries expressed at the meeting that I have mentioned.

The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West seemed to find the Bill dramatic, as if it were some fantastic shift in power from British Coal to the individual. I do not think that the balance has shifted in that way. If in the past it has been a David and Goliath battle, I take comfort from the fact that David always won. However, in many respects the battle is unequal. Up to a point I welcome the six-year rule as defined by the Minister. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron),

I wonder why we have to have a six-year limit anyway if the idea is that at any time damage emerges a home owner will be able to make a claim.

The Bill does not address what happens when subsidence occurs. Some hon. Members have spoken about the problem of blight. I quarrel in one respect with the otherwise excellent report by the Select Committee on Energy and therefore quarrel with the Bill in one fundamental respect. The Select Committee backed the Waddilove committee view about blight by saying that mining was no different from any other form of development. There is a case for arguing that subsidence is different in character from the problems arising from other developments in that it raises particular difficulties about borrowing money to buy and about selling homes. Those problems arise as soon as word gets around and the matter becomes public. It is not simply about loss of view or noise which can occur with other forms of development. The problem is insidious and unnerving. It undermines—sorry about the pun—confidence in one's property. There is a very strong case for including in the Bill some additional provision to take care of blight.

I hope that in Committee the Minister will take a positive view. Indeed, he may be forced to do so, as there are the makings—one sees the danger signs—of cross-party agreement on some aspects of the changes. Certainly, there is a need to examine the whole question of how claims will be dealt with when disputes arise. In saying so, I am referring not only to clause 41. I interrupted the Minister when he failed to describe clause 4. Let me tell hon. Members why. It appears that when British Coal responds to the initial notice of damage it will not have to seek agreement on the nature of works that have to be carried out. If I am wrong, the Minister will correct me—or perhaps the matter can be dealt with in Committee. When there is a dispute, even the schedules of remedial action will have to go to the Lands Tribunal.

It is 25 years since I was first elected to the House. During my first Parliament we passed the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. That, too, was a matter of great concern. Disputes under that legislation had to go to the Lands Tribunal. The tribunal is no informal, gentle, inexpensive institution. We ought to look at the character and nature of the disputes that arise; otherwise the change in the balance to which the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West referred will not amount to a right that can easily be exercised by the individual home owner.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) made a very forceful point about the destruction of records. Surely, given the disputes that have arisen—case after case has been mentioned in the House—an obligation should forthwith be placed on British Coal not to destroy plans or records. British Coal ought to be obliged to deposit such plans and records, not only because of their historical interest and archival value to the coal industry, but because of their practical value in the resolution of any disputes or claims that might arise in cases of subsidence. It is essential that Ministers come to the Standing Committee in the most positive possible frame of mind. In the case of the Broadcasting Act 1990, chunks of the legislation were written in Committee. I hope that Ministers will approach this Bill in the same way. Their approach must not be dampened or otherwise controlled by the hidden hand of British Coal. British Coal must not have any hidden veto.

As I said earlier, it is very sad that, in some ways, the responsibilities of British Coal, in respect of subsidence in my area, will become historic rather than current and future. In that context, I want to convey a final message to that very powerful organisation. For generations, our communities have suffered from subsidence and large-scale tip waste. Now, through reclamation—and, it appears, pit closures—subsidence will become a historic problem. I hope that we shall not simply swap the historic problem of subsidence for a new form of desecration by British Coal. I hope that British Coal, having destroyed our jobs, will not return to gouge out our hillsides by way of open-casting. I may have to spend the rest of this Parliament trying to make this a better Bill; I hope that I shall not have to spend the next Parliament dealing with an "Open Cast Amelioration Bill". Economic forces beyond the control of my community have destroyed jobs and will eventually make subsidence a historic problem there. I hope that, at last, we can look forward to a green and pleasant society such as others seem to enjoy.

9.14 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who has a number of friends in my constituency. He spoke eloquently of the changes that have been taking place in his historic constituency, changes that have affected my constituency over a longer period, so that he is coming to terms with the circumstances with which we were forced to come to terms a little earlier. I wish only that I could add to those matters that we have in common the size of his majority, which I believe is 28,000 which exceeds that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. We are working on it in my constituency and I hope eventually to share such a majority.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of interesting points. He was right to draw attention to the difficulties of the extractive industries in the United Kingdom, particularly the coal industry, which will soon face many problems in winning coal. The effects of mining activity are felt long after it has taken place. The compensation that the Bill will provide is one of those costs. Some of my hon. Friends have already pointed out that it is no different from any other industry in this respect. For example, in the nuclear industry, decommissioning is a major financial burden. We have to accept that the cost of subsidence is like any other cost such as that for machinery, wages or interest on borrowing. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) made that point.

The Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen will have to come to terms with this cost. While we welcome the Bill, I feel that we should flag it with the cautionary remark that if the Bill imposes even greater burdens on the coal industry, which will push up the price of coal, we must accept that consequence of the Bill, which I expect will be enacted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West also made the valid point that, in the past, mining subsidence was accepted because the people whose houses were affected invariably were employed in the coal industry or members of their family were employed in the industry. To a certain extent, it was a case of grin and bear

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it, even where that was because people felt intimidated and thought that the employer might take it out on them if they sought remedies for the injustice.

However, the situation is different today. The people with whom we are in touch in our constituencies and who are affected by mining subsidence are no longer connected with the coal industry. They are not employed in it and if any members of their family have any connections, it is usually the elderly relatives who used to be employed in it. That factor highlights the problem.

While nearly all hon. Members present in the Chamber have direct experience of these problems, many others do not. I was intrigued to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) say that his constituency had a coal mining problem. I suspect that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were also not aware of that, even though you represent a nearby constituency. Many hon. Members do not understand what we are talking about.

Mr. Jim Lester: One of the points about opening the channel tunnel and developing the railway to it—something that will benefit our constituents in the midlands and the north—is that it has provoked in the south-east a great deal of understanding about environmental damage.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that powerful intervention. I wish only that some of our hon. Friends who represent constituencies in Kent were able to make that connection. They are not able to do so when they object to things taking place in the lovely lush green pastures of their constituencies, although they think that it is fine for the grotty old midlands to put up with yet more despoliation so that they can enjoy those green fields. It is time that they considered what their fair share of the burden is.

It is hard for some people to appreciate the distress that mining subsidence causes. Not only does it devalue property—which, for most of us, constitutes the largest investment of our lifetime—but attempts to seek a remedy and justice are accompanied by incessant wrangling. There is even danger to life. I have experienced all these problems, and I have referred to them in the House on previous occasions. That being so, I shall not go into great detail this evening. I shall merely mention that properties in Church hill and Hednesford in my constituency have been racked by the problem for many years. Some hon. Members may remember the church that had to be pulled down. British Coal paid nearly £250,000 for the building of a new church. The bottom fell out of a working men's club, and British Coal paid for that to be replaced. Home owners, however, were told that there was no evidence of coal mining activity and that therefore the responsibility was not that of British Coal. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that British Coal, following my representations, has relented and now agrees to accept some degree of liability, although that has not yet been quantified.

I hope that British Coal, in its apparent act of magnanimity and generosity in accepting liability, will not struggle and prevaricate. I hope that it will be decent and honourable. The Bill's provisions will not apply to my constituents because their claims are now being dealt with. I hope also that a pre-emptive strike was not made by British Coal to sort out the problem under the old arrangements before the new arrangements come into effect.

I welcome the Bill. As the former Parliamentary Private Secretary to the former Minister with responsibilities for the coal industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), I pay my tribute to him for the part which he played during the time that I was his PPS at the Department of Energy to bring the Bill into the legislative programme. As some of my hon. Friends know, we PPSs are the important guys in these matters. I know, however, that my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South was extremely interested in the matters that are taken up in the Bill and conscious of the concerns that were expressed by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock) and for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and by various constituents, who tried to bring matters to a successful conclusion. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister has brought the Bill before the House.

I am sure that the determination that has been shown by the Government over the past three or four years has cajoled British Coal into accepting some of the Waddilove recommendations, such as prior notification and the new arbitration scheme, which started life in the past month. If the Government had not said that it was their firm intention to bring the Bill before the House, I do not believe that British Coal would have taken any action. It was the threat, as it were, of legislative action that prompted it to take action.

It is fair to say that hon. Members on both sides of the House have campaigned. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) did not mention that many of my hon. Friends, and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood, have been battling hard. It is a cross-party matter that affects all our constituents whichever way they vote.

The benefits of the Bill will be considerable and many of them have been alluded to already. There are five, however, that I wish to single out. First, unlike the 1975 legislation, which was introduced by the then Labour Government, this proposed legislation will impose the burden of proof upon British Coal to show that the damage done was not caused by mining subsidence. I am told by geologists in the United Kingdom that there is no such thing as natural movement in the earth's crust. We do not have a San Andreas fault in the United Kingdom. It is legitimate to presuppose that if subsidence has taken place, it is on account of extraction taking place under ground. We are not being unfair to British Coal in imposing the burden of proof upon it.

Secondly, it is extremely good news that repairs will be made to claimants' reasonable satisfaction. Thirdly, the right of claimants to have repairs carried out by their own contractors will be warmly welcomed by constituents who are affected by subsidence. Fourthly, the right to recover expenses will be welcomed. Fifthly—this point has not been made—clause 9(3) provides for local authorities to receive full reimbursement for the work that they carry out—for example, to the public highway. That will be of much interest to Cannock Chase district council, because its £30,000 bill for reinstating the road at Church hill is the subject of prevarication by British Coal, which wants to foot only 50 per cent. of the cost. I hope that it will show goodwill in anticipation of the enactment of the Bill.

Detailed points will be addressed in Committee. Hon. Members have referred to some of them, but I shall make two specific points. Clause 4 provides for British Coal to respond to a damage notice.

"as soon as reasonably practicable".

All hon. Members agree that the delays in claims for mining subsidence compensation are a major problem. British Coal should be required to respond to a damage notice within a specific time. I hope that that will be dealt with in Committee.

Dr. Woodcock: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems is that the Bill imposes specific time limits, not on British Coal but on claimants? As my hon. Friend said, the phrase "within a reasonable time" is mentioned several times, but a claimant has only 28 days in which to respond to a schedule served by British Coal. Does my hon. Friend agree that that does not seem to be reasonable?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend makes a fair point which will have to be considered in Committee. I hope that I can be allowed a wry smile about the concept of reasonableness. I introduced a Bill to change the law on obscenity, which introduced the concept of reasonableness. I was told that it could not pass into law because the test of reasonableness was not precise enough. I am interested to see that the Bill is littered with references to reasonableness. I have always found that a difficult concept to apply to British Coal.

Hon. Members mentioned information on previous subsidence claims. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reconsider that point, because prospective purchasers of a property should be aware of its subsidence history. Such a proposal could be bad news for owners of such property who have their houses properly and completely restored, only to find that people do not want to buy them simply because of that subsidence history.

Arbitration has been mentioned. I note that my hon. Friend the Minister is anxious to allow British Coal's voluntary arrangements to operate. The whole House will agree that the jury is out on those arrangements. We shall want to see substantial progress and that the voluntary system is working, otherwise we shall want other measures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), who unfortunately cannot be present because he is chairing a committee, is concerned about coal mining subsidence and the obligation to repurchase. I have told British Coal that it would save itself hassle if it agreed to repurchase property, do it up and sell it to a prospective purchaser, without any liability attaching thereto and in the full knowledge that the property has been subject to subsidence damage but has been repaired. It occasionally repurchases properties, and I am aware of one instance where it did so. However, that is very much the exception rather than the rule. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State may like to consider whether the arbitrators can suggest obligatory repurchase.

The Bill is an excellent start to remedy an injustice which affects many constituencies. The Government are to be congratulated on introducing such a welcome measure. The history of the issue is testimony to the stubborn foot-dragging of the nationalised British Coal over many years. Bit by bit, no doubt encouraged by the prospect of the Bill, British Coal has had wrung out of it a series of voluntary improvements. Some of the remedies will be enshrined in law by the Bill, but in many respects, particularly on the issue of arbitration, our constituents will remain at the mercy of British Coal's good faith. Speed and fairness are of the essence. Our constituents must be left in no doubt that, if British Coal fails to display that good will, a statutory scheme will be enacted.

9.30 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Like many hon. Members over the years, I have spoken about the problems of people suffering from mining subsidence. I welcome the Bill and, as a member of the Energy Select Committee, the fact that it arises out of that Committee's report. The Bill is long overdue. I do not intend to cover ground which has been covered already, but I believe that there are some points that should be considered in Committee. If ever there were a Bill that is a Committee Bill, it is this one.

It is right that I should declare an interest—my home is getting a hammering because of mining subsidence. I am worried about the historic costs. Following the Select Committee's recommendations, the Bill states that charges should be levied at individual pits. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), there is one pit left in my constituency—in 1985, there were eight. Which pit will bear the costs of the seven that have closed? If we stick rigidly to the Bill's provisions, where will the money come from to pay for subsidence damage caused by the closed pits?

It could be argued in a tight mining community such as mine, with eight pits, that some of the subsidence was caused by the one pit still operating. The costs imposed on that pit might be so excessive that it could become unprofitable, and we would lose the pit. There must be strict records and strict administration to find out whether all the subsidence results from the one pit that now operates.

Blight is a major problem and the cost of full compensation for it would be colossal. It is no good running away from that fact, but that does not make matters any easier for those living in the areas. I am sure that many other hon. Members who represent mining areas will know of estates where some houses have subsidence problems and others display no visible signs of damage. The moment subsidence is identified, however, the value of all the properties goes downhill; in some cases, they become unmarketable. Redundant miners often have to move to another part of the country to get a job and even if their property has not been damaged it can be an impossible task to sell it. British Coal is sympathetic and sometimes tries to help in some cases, but not always.

We must also consider the problem of tilt. In one avenue in my constituency, British Coal has purchased three or four houses suffering from subsidence damage but has decided not to buy a couple of properties that have been left with tilt. British Coal has put the properties that it has purchased on the market, with advertisements in the local press and in the local estate agents' offices saying that it is offering the houses for £10,0000, £12,000 or £13,000 because they have been damaged by subsidence.

Two unfortunate constituents of mine who live in one of the other houses, which is suffering from shocking tilt, were initially offered £2,500—later upped to £3,500—in compensation. In other words, although British Coal admits that the value of the houses that it has purchased

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is only £10,000 to £12,000, it is offering my constituents only about £3,000 in respect of properties that would have fetched £40,000 had they not been damaged. I hope that the Bill will protect those people.

Clause 11 says:

"the Corporation shall make in respect of the dwelling-house a payment equal to the amount of the depreciation in the value of the dwelling-house caused by the damage."

I have no general complaints about the administration of the subsidence department in my area. The people who work there do their level best to meet their obligations. Nevertheless, the examples that I have given show that great problems remain for the victims of mining subsidence.

I welcome the establishment of advice centres. When, on a number of occasions, I visited Nottingham with members of the Select Committee on Energy, I found out that there is a real need for advice. I should like the advice centres to be staffed by professional advisers. Many people in Nottingham received no advice, or advice from agents who were far from honest; I understand that some of the agents have faced criminal charges. Professional advisers would not have been able to act in that way. I hope that the Minister will seriously consider that question in Committee.

Let me make a proposal which I believe would go some way towards solving the problems of blight and of excessive damage to some properties. It has always amazed me that British Coal—and, before it, the National Coal Board—could not get down to the problem at the planning stage and say to local authorities, "There may well be subsidence damage in this area."

It should be part of planning consents that houses in some areas should have been built on rafts, at a cost of about £2,000. That would have saved British Coal a great deal of money in having to purchase property, demolish houses or repair them. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the local authority planning departments and British Coal could have worked together to provide new properties with rafts. That would have eliminated many of the problems that have arisen.

Mr. Jim Lester: We invented the Clasp building system in Nottinghamshire to build schools, hospitals and public buildings on rafts that allow movement because our area suffers from subsidence. That system has been valuable in this country and also in areas that suffer from earthquakes.

Mr. Lofthouse: There must be consultation with the planning authorities and I hope that British Coal will get round to that. I am sure that such consultation would be beneficial in those mining areas.

We all recognise that the major problem is going to diminish because the number of pits mining coal is going to decline. If Mr. Baker, the chairman of National Power, carries out his threat to import 50 per cent. of the fuel to generate electricity for National Power, there will be another rapid rundown of the mining industry. If British Coal can take precautionary measures before building houses, that would be a step in the right direction.

The Select Committee on Energy can be well pleased with the main aspects of the Bill because it contains much that the Select Committee recommended. Hon. Members have grumbled in the past, as I have, that we put a lot of work into Select Committees, but no one seems to take any notice. However, we cannot say that on this occasion, because the work of the Select Committee on Energy is evident in the Bill.

I hope that the Standing Committee will be able to improve the Bill. I hope that that will benefit the country, and especially Nottingham and Mansfield, where there is a major problem with subsidence. I know from my visits to Mansfield of the colossal amount of work that my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) has done on this problem over the past few years and he should be congratulated on that work. I hope that the Committee will be able to approve many amendments to improve the Bill, which is only a step in the right direction.

9.42 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): May I first declare an indirect interest in the subject through my association with Alliance International which looks after British Coal affairs. However, my primary and overriding interest lies with my constituents. Although I no longer have any active pits in my constituency, I can assure hon. Members that the impact of subsidence continues and I am delighted that it seems that we are about to resolve the problem with the Bill.

The Bill has been long in gestation, but now that we are debating it I am glad that it has been largely welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is the product of fairly objective discussions that have taken place over many years with many different groups. It has been backed across the party divide. The mild chastisement of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) was an understatement, because the hon. Gentleman gave a most ungenerous welcome to a Bill for which we have all waited for a long time.

I am sure that British Coal does not agree with everything in the Bill. However, we should be fair and, to its credit, British Coal produced the householders arbitration scheme in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. Notwithstanding the scheme that it produced, British Coal welcomes the Bill as a blueprint for a system that it and hon. Members will find will work in practice and not just be words on the statute book.

One criticism might be that much is implied in the Bill that some would wish be made more explicit. No doubt hon. Members will probe that point in Committee.

On an initial reading of the Bill and of the background papers, the Bill appears to represent a balanced approach between the interests of householders, service interests, and the legitimate interests of mining operators. I was surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) dismissed a sense of balance in these matters. Although, naturally, all of us are much more concerned with the impact of subsidence on the individual householder—the little man facing big brother, British Coal—there must be a balance and justice on both sides.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): The hon. Gentleman talks about the imbalance between big brother, British Coal and the householder, but he ignores one major factor —the insurance companies. For many years, insurance companies have been taking a large amount of money in premiums off everyone who buys a house, yet they refuse to pay out for subsidence, or they insert a small clause that limits them to perhaps 10 per cent. of the cost. The Bill

does not refer to insurance companies having any responsibility. Surely the third factor should be involved. Insurance companies have made a great profit without paying anything out.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He was not present to hear the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's intervention is out of context and away from the main point. I am perfectly happy for that matter to be discussed in Committee. Like many other hon. Members, I have come across that aspect.

Another criticism might be the uncertainty in establishing the full extent of repairs that are needed and the extent to which British Coal would be expected to pay. That is not an unreasonable concern for any householder, but I do not believe that the Bill is anything more than a sensible recognition of British Coal's duty to take action —clause 2—prepare a schedule of work—clause 6—and, to put it simply, get on with it—clause 7—to the reasonable satisfaction of the claimant. The agreed schedule arising from the notice and its acceptance will cover only damage that it is reasonably practicable to repair.

Nevertheless, the kinds of remedial action listed in clause 2(2) can in some instances be cumulative. It is surely implicit that British Coal could take one or more of the options listed in clause 2(2). For example, it is not uncommon for British Coal to repair damage other than, say, the residual tilt to a property, to which my hon. Friend the Minister and one or two other hon. Members referred, and then make a depreciation payment for the residual tilt that cannot be repaired. Therefore, the mining operator would meet its obligation under clause 2(2)(c).

Clause 11(3) provides the claimant with protection where remedial works have been executed, but where there is clear depreciation in the value of the property and where the making good of the damage simply is not possible—hence a depreciation payment. I can imagine lawyers' eyes lighting up at that—it is bread and meat to them—but I cannot imagine any other way of resolving that problem. Like the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), I have properties in my constituency that have been repaired but are clearly not 100 per cent. right—there is a tilt to them. Any buyer looking at such a house would consider that fact. There is no doubt that the value of such houses has diminished because they are on a slight tilt.

Mr. Jim Lester: Just a slight tilt?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) has an example of a 5 in tilt, which is a big tilt. I have not had cases of that much tilt, but I take his point.

There have been arguments and misunderstandings tonight about the six-year rule. Provided that it does not disqualify a claimant from claiming for subsequent damage following completion of an agreed schedule of work, the six-year rule seems fair. It is tied not to the date on which the damage occurred but to the first date on which the person entitled to claim became aware of the damage. That concept has already been established in housing legislation. I am not sure which housing Bill made it clear, but claims do not have to go back to when the person bought the house; the clock begins to run when the person who bought the house from the local council discovered the defect or, in this case, the subsidence damage.

If the parties agree that it would be sensible to allow some time to pass, perhaps to establish the full extent of the damage, that could be allowed. I am not an engineer and perhaps people want the matter to be settled and finalised, but at least the full extent of the damage could be established. I have visited houses where a modicum of repair had been carried out by the coal board, but two years later a crack has appeared in the bathroom. That is plastered over, but a year later a crack appears in the kitchen. I hope that a mechanism can be created which will allow a sensible time to establish whether the contractor, British Coal, or whoever is carrying out the repair, has done the full work necessary. I hope that that principle will not be undermined by the six-year rule.

Mr. Allen McKay: The hon. Gentleman refers to temporary repairs. It all depends on how severe the subsidence is. It would be inadequate to ask people to live in poor conditions without remedial work being done.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I have no reason to doubt the hon. Gentleman. I merely wish to illustrate that when someone sees a crack and correctly notifies British Coal instantly, which then mends only the crack, major problems may not be identified because in a sense they were tackled too quickly.

Again, I seek guidance. If a schedule is agreed and fulfilled and further subsidence occurs, will the claimant be deemed to be making a fresh claim that should stand on its own merit, regardless of any earlier repairs? That arises time and time again in Wollaton in Nottingham. The pit there closed in 1966. That is a long time ago and the answer comes back from British Coal that mining ended in 1966 so it cannot be the cause of the subsidence. People who had repairs done in the 1970s and early 1980s were told that the damage could not have been caused by mining subsidence because mining stopped in 1966. That again raises a question about whether the repairs were fully carried out in the first place, perhaps in the early 1980s.

As has been said, British Coal has already established an arbitration scheme for claims in respect of domestic properties. It is intended to apply to cases where no complex issues of fact or law arise. I am afraid that my legal friends on both the Conservative and Opposition Benches will always be involved when more complex matters arise, which involve evidence, hearings and so on. The long-established Lands Tribunal is well able to deal with such cases, so no new organisation is needed. While the arbitration scheme should meet the needs of most claimants, I hope that the Secretary of State will ensure that we do not end up with an unduly bureaucratic system.

I have one word of caution. It arises from one of the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Rother Valley, which was picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe, about a person who accepts money to do his own repairs or employs his own contractor.

I remember problems with housing repairs and improvements grants, when local authorities paid money to residents to pay a contractor and somewhat shoddy work was done by unapproved builders. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe says, if someone agrees a schedule of work with British Coal—under the

[Mr. Brandon-Bravo]

provisions in the Bill—says that he wants to do the work himself and takes the money to do it, in the interests of equity British Coal cannot then be asked to accept responsibility if the work turns out to be unsatisfactory in the future. There could be arguments about whether cracks that reappear are due to fresh subsidence or bad workmanship. By all means let that provision remain in the Bill, but I urge caution on anyone who wants to take that risk.

The Bill is fairly technical, even though it is short. Perhaps it will be a lawyers' paradise, as such Bills often are, but, at long last, it provides some certainty for our householders. They have suffered fear and worry for many years: fear of how far damage to their homes might go: fear that they could not afford repairs if they found that they were not covered by the coal board; and, worst of all, fear that they would never be able to sell the property and move on. I know of a number of pensioner couples who would dearly love to sell their homes and buy something smaller. They feel as if they are locked in a house with cracks, which they know they will not be able to sell for its full value.

The Bill is not everything that we might wish for, but there was no reason for the ungenerous—even mealy-mouthed—acceptance which the hon. Member for Rother Valley gave it.

9.57 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I welcome the Bill in much the same way that my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) welcomed it. The measure is long overdue and there is much within the Bill that we like, but there is also much that we would like to be clarified and perhaps improved, and I do not think that my hon. Friend's welcome to the Bill was mealy-mouthed.

I welcome the Bill as a Member of Parliament representing a coalfield area, who receives numerous complaints about subsidence, and as a member of the Select Committee on Energy, which considered mining subsidence in considerable detail last year and produced a detailed report. Many of our recommendations have been taken on board by the Government. The fact remains that too much of the Bill gives British Coal the last word or the final decision, and Opposition Members would like an improvement to those aspects of the Bill.

I have received serious complaints from constituents and I shall refer to some of them instead of the mechanics of the Bill. I hope that some of these issues will be tackled, clarified and thrashed out in Committee. Tonight, we have learnt that considerable confusion surrounds the time limits which have been imposed in the past. These limits are clearly set out in the Bill, but there have been occasions when British Coal has used quite a different time limit from that which existed under the law. Liability has been denied in certain cases because of the time that elapsed between mining activities and the date of the claim. The Bill specifies a time limit of six years from the time when a claimant should have reasonable knowledge of damage. Under previous legislation, two months were allowed to submit a claim.

Reference was made to the evidence taken by the Energy Select Committee in Mansfield. On that occasion, two members of the coal board giving evidence the same day clearly did not understand—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Illsley: I was making the point that even British Coal's own representatives did not appear to understand the time limits, believing that the relevant period was that which elapsed between the ending of mining activities and the claim. British Coal can always use the defence that damage was not caused by mining subsidence, because the workings of a particular colliery would have settled some time before, and that some other factor must be to blame.

The Waddilove committee recommended that there should be no time limit, arguing that every case should be considered on its merits, and that if mining subsidence was to blame, then the claim should be met. The time limit applies only from the time that the damage occurred, not from the date of mining.

The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) said that the Bill's time limits are exactly right, but each claim should surely be considered in its own right. When a person notices damage, he will usually notify British Coal immediately. It will appraise the damage in relation to the area, and consult its plans and records, in determining whether the damage is a consequence of mining. British Coal may go back well beyond six years. As the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West knows from his own professional activities, the time limit only relates to an individual prevaricating about issuing a notice after damage has become apparent. It is designed to deter an individual from staring at a crack in his wall for six years before submitting a claim.

Even if British Coal can prove that damage has not been caused by subsidence, it might have to check back on workings over the past century. The appropriateness of a six-year time limit will no doubt be explored in Committee, together with Waddilove's recommendations that none should exist.

Delay is also of major concern. I refer not to delayed claims, but to delay on the part of British Coal in undertaking repairs, with house owners having to wait years in some cases before work is completed. I refer to the point made by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo). If British Coal believes that there is a risk of further damage, it will issue a stop notice to prevent any repairs being made—unless of an emergency nature—until such time as it is clear that no additional damage will arise. That can lead to houses and even whole estates being left for years before British Coal effects any repairs. I know of one claimant who was re-housed in transit accommodation, pending repairs to his own property, three years ago.

The alternative accommodation offered by British Coal is usually of a high standard and quite acceptable. I have experienced no problems or complaints about the standard of transit accommodation, simply about the length of time that people have to be re-housed away from their homes waiting for repairs to be carried out. The lack of transit accommodation to a suitable standard often

causes problems because there are insufficient transit houses to accommodate people while repairs are carried out.

Mr. Ashby: The Bill states that a person can have repairs done himself, and therefore push British Coal aside.

Mr. Illsley: It is a welcome aspect of the Bill that claimants can now choose between waiting for British Coal or employing contractors of their own. I hope that that will go some way towards alleviating the delays experienced by my constituents. One street in my constituency has been totally demolished—about six or seven bungalows have been taken down and completely rebuilt. The delays in completing the work were considerable. In the heavily-mined constituencies of most hon. Members present, many claims are pending from people whose properties have suffered significant damage. There is a conflict between the ideas proposed by Waddilove. He believed that the emphasis should be placed on repairs rather than awarding a claimant money to carry out repairs or hire a contractor, which might lead to some claimants looking at the damage, deciding they can live with it and spending the money on something else. We should all want to avoid that because we want to maintain the housing stock and ensure that the compensation system for mining subsidence is genuine, repairs are carried out and there is no malpractice.

With respect to standards of repair, my constituents have sent me photographs time and again of the evidence of subsidence and I have been asked to visit properties to look at the standard of repairs carried out by British Coal or contractors employed by it. In many cases it is quite appalling. In the old days, British Coal had estates departments, with qualified workmen responsible for maintaining British Coal's housing stock and carrying out subsidence repairs. Their standards were quite high, but some of the standards of repair that I have seen in the past couple of years are not entirely adequate. The standard laid down in the Bill is

"to the reasonable satisfaction of the claimant."

I hope that that provision will ease those problems.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South mentioned repeat claims. Having allowed for the appropriate stop notices and time limits, a claimant often submits a repeat claim for damage to that which has already been repaired. British Coal says that the damage is often due to the movement of the new plasterwork or the settling-in of new window frames. It is obvious that, in the absence of any other subsidence or factor, the damage must have been caused by mining subsidence not settling down properly or the same place being affected again.

With regard to the determination of claims, as many other hon. Members have said, the problem lies with British Coal, which is judge and jury in all matters.

British Coal has all the information relating to mining in the district, which is obviously one of the reasons why the onus of proof has been put on British Coal. In most cases it has the plans, although in some cases it has no records of where mining has occurred. As it usually has all the details, it is in a better position than the claimant to determine a claim. The final decision rests with British Coal and it is difficult for a claimant faced with British Coal to dispute its plans, information or what its mining surveyor says.

British Coal is also the final arbiter when it comes to the level of damage. It has set standards relating to tilt, a problem that several hon. Members have mentioned: it can be as much as 5 ins. When a case is on the borderline, it can mean the difference between a compensation payment, the floors of the building being jacked and the property being knocked down and completely rebuilt. In properties in my constituency, claimants have rolled a billiard ball from one corner to another, and seen the tilts and twists. It is a bit like walking into the fun house in Blackpool, where the staircase goes sideways.

Few cases go to the Lands Tribunal. The Select Committee found that, in 1987-88, 33 claims were taken to the tribunal, 31 were withdrawn and two were settled by British Coal beforehand. That is a weakness in the Bill which many hon. Members have pointed out. British Coal may present an arbitration scheme—over and above its current scheme, that is—but we have not been told how good such a scheme would be. Many hon. Members have already pointed out that the existing scheme is not good enough, because British Coal's permission is required before a claimant can take advantage of it. Another disadvantage is the imposition of a £50 charge before a case can go to arbitration.

Mr. Barron: Plus VAT.

Mr. Illsley: That may not sound much when repairs costing thousands of pounds are needed to a property, but it presents rather an obstacle to those in receipt of low incomes and benefits.

I welcome the appointment of an adjudicator. The Select Committee report recommended the appointment of some kind of ombudsman, and I hope that the adjudicator will help to resolve some of the difficulties—although I still feel that an entirely independent adjudication system would ultimately be preferable. No doubt amendments to that effect can be debated in Committee.

I agree entirely with the idea of an advice centre, suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse). If nothing else, it would get subsidence claims out of Members' surgeries. A national centre, or centres in various localities, could provide far more expertise than my hon. Friends or me.

On finding subsidence damage, many of my constituents go first to an estate agent or mining subsidence agent. Such people, however, simply act as a postbox between the claimant and British Coal, picking up the fee at the end of the day. Claimants come to me asking, "Will you please help me with my mining subsidence claim? The agent has told me that he can do nothing", or "The agent is dragging his feet." Usually, after an intervention by letter, things get moving again; the agent generally does not know what to do, or simply does not want to do it. If more is involved than sending a letter to British Coal and waiting for a cheque, they do not want to know.

Mr. Meale: Many agents use hon. Members, or attempt to use them, simply to extend that postbox system, so that they can charge clients extra fees. Labour Members have received hundreds of letters from agents about their constituents, all of whom have been charged small amounts at some stage.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has considerable experience of mining agents. We on the Select

[Mr. Illsley]

Committee were surprised when we visited his constituency to see such a proliferation of mining subsidence agents. In my constituency, where coal mining has been carried on for hundreds of years, I cannot think of one such agent. It is usually surveyors or estate agents who provide a service for mining subsidence. I have considerable doubts about the involvement of agents and would prefer to see a simple, uncomplicated, free arbitration service backed by an advice centre from which people could get free and fair advice.

I support the call for British Coal to keep a register. The Select Committee touched on that when we said that we thought that a register going back about 15 years and providing details of claims relating to properties should be brought into operation. British Coal has considerable records, and it would be its task to computerise them, bring them up to date and centralise them. There should be a register at some point to help claimants to avoid the problems of blight, and to show purchasers exactly how many claims have been made against a property. Searches by British Coal solicitors should remain compulsory, and more should be done to ensure that purchasers have enough information about property to enable them to be advised about exactly what dangers lie ahead.

I welcome the Bill's proposals about notification. Far too little notice is given to people in mining areas about when mining is to take place. Such information is always difficult to find and is always subject to change by British Coal. The notification provision would help in relation to time limits, and it would also help British Coal which could say that people had been notified about mining in their area at a precise time and should therefore have been on their guard for damage which occurred after that. It would alert residents of the possibility of damage, and that would be a big advantage.

Some hon. Members talked about blight. The blight in some areas would be alleviated if people had confidence in the fairness of a compensation system and a simple arbitration scheme. Much of the blight on properties in mining areas could be removed by such schemes.

I am conscious of the effect of subsidence on collieries. Some collieries in my constituency were closed because of subsidence and some have been calculated as too expensive to run because of the projected cost of damage to buildings above the mine workings. Subsidence is a heavy cost on the industry at a time when it is facing many difficulties. I agree with the hon. Members for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Leicestershire, North-West that a balance must be struck. If all subsidence claims went ahead and the cost of them became excessive, it would be a greater threat to the future of the industry than the threats from imported coal and other forms of power generation.

Mining subsidence causes great stress and heartache. As many hon. Members have said, a person's property is probably the biggest investment he will ever make. I give the Bill a guarded welcome and look forward to the proceedings in Committee.

10.18 pm

Dr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I warmly welcome the Bill, which is long overdue. The Government can take some credit for seeking to remove some of the worst injustices arising from the damage caused by subsidence. However, they can take a little less credit for the time that they have taken. As we all know, Waddilove reported as long ago as 1984. The Government took three years to respond, a further year to issue a consultation paper, and another three years to introduce the Bill. In 1986-87 the Energy Select Committee said that it was not satisfied with the system and asked why it had taken three years, following Waddilove, to devise a more equitable system of determining subsidence damage. A further four years have elapsed. Yes, the Government are to be warmly congratulated, but this action is not before time.

I mention the delay because I seek not to be critical of the Government, but to stress the importance of getting it right this time. So many people have waited for so long that it would be tragic if we got it wrong again and if we did not ensure that the Bill contained all the right provisions. I pay tribute to the people who have campaigned long and hard to have the Bill brought to fruition. I mention particularly, but not exclusively, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), who was particularly helpful while he was a Parliamentary Private Secretary. The united industry working party has joined many other organisations that are concerned about remedying subsidence damage. Without its efforts, we should probably not be debating the Bill tonight.

Let me declare an interest—in fact, several interests. I advise the Chamber of Coal Traders; I live in an area and in a house affected by subsidence damage; I have business premises that are affected by subsidence damage; my home is surrounded by farmland that is affected by subsidence damage. But, more important than all that, I know hundreds of people whose homes have been damaged. These people, without exception, regard the present law as inadequate. They think that British Coal is operating unreasonably and unfairly, and they are of the opinion that new legislation is long overdue. Similarly, every solicitor, every professional adviser and every accountant to whom I have spoken regards the present position as being unfair.

Thus the Bill is to be warmly welcomed in principle. It is a large and complicated piece of legislation. I do not intend to deal at this stage with matters of detail, which can best be addressed in Committee. However, I want to mention a few points that the Bill addresses adequately, and a few of those with which it does not deal adequately. Let me deal first with those matters in respect of which the Bill does a good job. The Government are to be congratulated on the definition of the standard of repair. The Bill resolves the differences between the Acts of 1957 and 1975. British Coal will be obliged to carry out repairs to the reasonable satisfaction of the claimant. That is satisfactory. Some commentators have argued that British Coal is not required to carry out repairs to the standard that applied before the damage occurred. I understand that argument, but I believe that, in practice, the courts will find little distinction between the two standards.

The second area in which the Bill does a good job concerns clarification of the time limit for notifying damage. Under the 1957 Act the requirement is two months. Clearly, such a short period is ridiculous—especially when viewed against British Coal's record in the discharge of its responsibilities. The six-year rule that was

unilaterally imposed by British Coal under the 1975 Act was very often applied incorrectly. Many hon. Members have related their experience of British Coal's interpretation of the six years as starting on the date of the beginning of mining, rather than on the date on which damage occurred. That rule had no basis, either legally or morally. Clause 3 makes provision for claimants to serve a damage notice within six years of the first time they ought reasonably to have been aware of the damage. That is much clearer and much fairer.

The third area in which the Bill does a good job concerns the obligation imposed on British Coal to meet claimants' expenses that have been reasonably incurred. That is a good provision, which is wider than the voluntary code that British Coal applies now under which it pays only for professional advice in many cases, and often for only part of that professional advice. I note that there is no definition of "reasonable", and that could cause a problem. It is wrong that anyone who undertakes a successful claim against British Coal should be left out of pocket. Those are the best provisions of the Bill. They are excellent and do a good job.

Unfortunately, the Bill has many shortcomings, about which I hope that Ministers will think, and which I hope that the Committee will address. The first is the arbitration provisions covered by clause 41. Waddilove recommeded as early as 1984 that there should be an arbitration scheme. It was obviously necessary. I am sure that we can understand the reluctance of the man in the street to go to law against a mighty state industry using the taxpayers' money to fight its legal battles. For several years, British Coal claimed to have a voluntary system of independent adjudication, a system which it replaced in January this year, and that that voluntary scheme was one of the reasons why legislation on arbitration was not necessary. In reality, that scheme meant almost nothing. It was rarely used because British Coal stood in the way of its use.

Since 1 January, a new voluntary arbitration scheme, which at first glance appears to be fair and reasonable, has been in place. It is conducted by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, British Coal pays most of the costs, with claimants paying a £50 registration fee if it is proved wrong, and the findings are binding on both parties. One may think that that is excellent because, for the first time, claimants have the right to cheap, fair adjudication in disputes with British Coal. However, we must not be fooled. If one reads the small print, one sees that the scheme can be used only if both the claimant and British Coal agree. What nonsense that is. What use is a right of arbitration if the party that is in the wrong can refuse access to the arbitration process even if the claimant wants to use it?

Arbitration is a common feature of many commercial contracts. For example, if parties cannot agree on a rent review, each has the right of arbitration. That fact is a spur to each party to act reasonably, not to make excessive demands and to seek agreement. If one party to any commercial contract can act unreasonably and then deny the other party access to arbitration, an arbitration scheme is made worthless. It is like saying that anybody anywhere can agree to arbitration. Of course he can, but that is not a right to arbitration. A right exists only if both parties can go to arbitration even if the other party objects.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman is making a good case about the arbitration scheme which we were told was introduced on 1 January. He asked earlier whether carrying out repairs to the reasonable satisfaction of the person whose property had been damaged was the right sort of test. "Reasonable" crops up again in relation to the six-year rule. One has to show that it is reasonable to expect a person to know that the damage had occurred six years before. A dispute on that point can be denied referral to arbitration if British Coal denies that it falls within the six-year rule.

Dr. Woodcock: The hon. Gentleman has still not grasped the point, which has been made several times, that, under the Bill, a claim can be made up to six years after the damage occurred, not six years after mining. If we were to rely on the provisions of the arbitration scheme, British Coal could refuse anyone the right to go to arbitration, no matter whether the case arose in fewer than six years, six years or more than six years. Whatever it is British Coal has to agree. If it wished, British Coal could say, "If we feel that we are right and that we have a cast iron case, we shall let you go to arbitration. If we think that you are right and that we are wrong, we shall refuse you arbitration and you will not be able to go before the arbitrators." That is crazy.

The Bill will allow the Secretary of State to direct that British Coal sets up a proper scheme, and in that respect the Bill is deficient. It should require the Secretary of State to require British Coal to submit such a scheme. We all know what will happen in the absence of a requirement. We have a voluntary new arbitration scheme, and it is likely that the Bill will be enacted. If we are not careful, the Secretary of State will say, "Let us see whether the arbitration scheme works. Now is not the time to legislate." If that happens, we shall have another three or four years of British Coal refusing arbitration while the Secretary of State makes up his mind whether to introduce a scheme. The arbitration should be put on a statutory footing now. Claimants should have a right to go to arbitration irrespective of British Coal's wishes.

Secondly, the Bill's provisions to provide compensation for inconvenience and disturbance are deficient. Clause 25 allows the Secretary of State to require such a scheme. It should go further and require imposition. British Coal has demonstrated time and again its ability to persuade the Department of Energy to adopt a course that is not in the interests of the victims of subsidence damage. The House should not leave a further loophole. Instead of giving the Secretary of State the right to ask for a scheme, it should require a scheme to be introduced.

The third defect is the three-year limit on instituting legal proceedings from when British Coal was first in breach of its duty to repair. On the face of it, that seems reasonable, but what is the position of all the claimants who, during the past seven years since the Waddilove committee reported, have had their claims rejected under the old arbitrary rules? Those claimants would not be turned down if the Bill were an Act. Are we saying that such claimants will be disbarred under clause 42, which imposes a three-year rule? If so, that is not justice.

It is right that the Bill should impose a three-year limit on new claims, but it should allow all claimants who were rejected under the arbitrary approach to institute proceedings under the terms set out in the Bill or to make a new claim under the Bill irrespective of the six-year rule for notifying damage. If the Government do not accept that, thousands of people will be denied justice. There are

[Dr. Woodcock]

thousands of householders who had claims rejected by British Coal's interpretation of its self-imposed six-year rule.

The fourth defect is to be found in clause 43, which deals with the investigation of complaints. The clause allows the Secretary of State to set up a scheme but I believe that it should impose one. We have watchdogs for all sorts of things in public life and in industry. We even have a watchdog for coal consumers, the Domestic Coal Consumers Council. Yet we have nothing for the victims of subsidence. Experience dictates that there should be such a scheme.

I shall detain the House for not much longer. I have mentioned some of the Bill's principal defects but there are others, including the discretion that British Coal has and retains in determining the method of meeting a claim. No similar discretion is allowed to claimants. There is no requirement to notify all owners of property rather than occupiers. A time limit is imposed on claimants but not on British Coal. British Coal may take months to prepare schedules of damage in the absence of a specific time limit. On receiving such a schedule, the claimant has only 28 days to consider it and reject it. He may be on holiday or he may have other matters to attend to. He may be in need of professional advice but he has only 28 days. Why are time limits imposed on a man who has no professional advice and expertise, whereas no time limits are imposed on British Coal, which has professional advice and expertise and is staffed to deal with matters in a timely manner?

All those matters should be dealt with by the Bill. Basically, it is a good Bill and it should be welcomed. It has the right intentions, but I fear that it is still weighted in favour of British Coal and against the man in the street. The Government should take the opportunity to table suitable amendments and so ensure that justice is no longer denied to the thousands of claimants who, because of lack of money, expertise, will or courage, have had full justice denied to them for so long. Yes, the Government are to be congratulated on at last introducing the Bill, but they have some way to go yet. They must not lose the opportunity to accept sensible amendments in Committee and to ensure, once and for all, that the problem of subsidence damage is eradicated.

10.35 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I view the Bill from my experience as an ex-industrial relations officer for the National Coal Board, as a local councillor for 20 years and as a Member of Parliament whose constituency has been blighted by mining subsidence for some considerable time.

Anyone who has not seen a complete village subject to the severest mining subsidence has not seen mining subsidence. In that village, 142 prefabricated houses, 36 stone-built houses and virtually two streets were demolished. It has taken 20 years for the village to come on stream again, but come on stream it has. Its scars have disappeared and the gaps between buildings are now gardens.

The Bill, like every mining Bill, provides no compensation for the stress and strain that those people suffered in those 20 years. There is no compensation for people whose houses were severely damaged and who, as a result, had nervous breakdowns and sometimes ended up in an institution. That happened to two of my constituents. Although one could not put one's hand on one's heart and say that the cause was subsidence, there is no doubt that it contributed.

When I asked British Coal why no payments are made for stress and strain, it said that stress and strain cannot be measured. The same used to be said of compensation for diseases, but the Department of Health now measures degrees of disability. I see no reason why stress and strain because of subsidence should not be calculated on the same basis.

The hon. Member for Leicestershire North-West (Mr. Ashby) is a lawyer, and I accept his interpretation of the six-year rule, but what matters is not his but the board's interpretation. It has interpreted its six-year rule in many ways. I understand it as the period not from when coal has begun to be taken out but when it has ceased to be taken out, after which the board accepts no liability.

That is why I think that there is a great need for an arbitration scheme that allows either of the parties to decide whether to go for arbitration. Like the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock), I know what will happen: the board will agree to arbitration for cases that it knows it can win, but not for cases that it is likely to lose. If a claimant's bid for arbitration is refused, he can go either to the Secretary of State or the Lands Tribunal. Nobody will apply to the Lands Tribunal because of the sheer cost and the length of time that an application takes.

The way in which arbitration works in industrial relations is at the back of British Coal's mind—if both parties agree to take their dispute to arbitration, the case goes to arbitration, but if one party decides not to do so, it does not. British Coal is probably considering the possibility of creating precedents.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) said that he would like to remove the clause allowing a person to pick his own builder or to do the job himself. I should like that clause strengthened. I am involved in a case in which British Coal decided that its workmen were too busy to do some work, which meant that a long period would pass before remedial work could be done. British Coal asked the person concerned to get three quotations from three builders on the schedule of repairs which had been agreed. He did so, but because they did not agree with what British Coal thought should be the cost, the quotations were rejected.

I asked the man to get three more quotations, to find out whether the first three were similar, and he did. Lo and behold, they were in line with the three previous quotations. British Coal will not accept the quotations because it says that the cost is £1,000 higher than it would be if it did the work.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I returned to the Chamber just as the hon. Gentleman commented on my speech. I shall check *Hansard*. I did not say that I wanted that clause taken out of the Bill; I was merely asking would-be claimants to exercise a little caution if they wished to choose their own contractor, for the good reasons which my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) illustrated. We can leave the clause in the Bill, but householders should be careful if they use their own contractor.

Mr. McKay: Indeed. If householders use their own contractor, or do the job themselves, all obligations on British Coal cease. If anything happens after that, British Coal can say, "It was your builder, not ours. Your builder must correct the problem." There can be no retrospective claim on British Coal.

I shall give some cases which could be put right if the arbitration provisions were remedied. The whole of a farmer's land suffered from mining subsidence which was so severe that he had to sell his herd of cows because his milking and cow sheds fell in. Unfortunately, that coincided with the introduction of milk quotas. He had no cows, so he did not get a milk quota. He now has a marvellous milk parlour and cow sheds, but no cows. There is no compensation to cover such a knock-on effect.

I am involved in another case in which British Coal said, "That was not our fault. The subsidence must have been caused by shrinkage." However, it has pulled down and rebuilt four houses nearby and repaired the adjoining property and other property. There is the spectacle of an 8 ft wall, half of it new—constructed by British Coal—and the other half broken because British Coal will not accept liability for it. It says that the property is too old and that the problems are not caused by mining subsidence. My argument is that it may be old property, but there was a knock-on effect from subsidence. That person is caught. If mining subsidence is not to blame, the damage will be the subject of an insurance claim. The insurance company says that mining subsidence is to blame, so my constituent cannot win. The case will probably end up in court somewhere.

Let me return to the question of the board doing the repairs. The board's workmen were advised against jacking up a huge bungalow. The person who lived in that bungalow had spent his savings on building it because his wife was an invalid. He built it with that in mind. The board decided to jack the building up rather than doing what it was doing next door, which was to pull down and rebuild. As a result, the bungalow now has six steps even though the couple built it to provide ground-level accommodation for the wife. There is no compensation for that; there is nothing that the couple can do about it. The Bill should take such matters into consideration.

The board always seeks to include its favourite clause —the full and final settlement clause. How can one have full and final settlement when the earth continues to move? In the village of Elsecar, for example, the earth is still moving after 20 years. Yet I guarantee that if anyone now submits a claim, British Coal will go back to the full and final settlement clause.

Those are some of the matters that the Bill should put right. I welcome the Bill because it is a step in the right direction. The Committee must bear in mind the fact that the Bill could represent our last opportunity to deal with the matter. If the industry continues in its present direction it certainly will be. With the shrinkage of the industry, it could be our last chance to put things right.

Neither the Committee nor the House should rush things. We should get the details right. There seems to me to be a large degree of consensus and I think that the Committee will be a happy one. The agreement between hon. Members on both sides of the House should be translated into fact so that the Bill will be better when it emerges from Committee.

[Mr. McKay]

10.46 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) said that this was very much a Committee Bill. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have argued, it will certainly require extensive amendment in Committee and on Report. The Minister described the Bill as a consolidation Bill. To the extent that it is a consolidation Bill, it consolidates legislation which is not acceptable and which needs to be extended. We must ensure that it is a stepping stone to help us to deal with the problems of coal mining subsidence rather than being another stumbling block in our way, and it is in danger of becoming a stumbling block unless some of the ideas expressed in the debate today are taken on board in Committee.

Many hon. Members have referred to clause 41, which I approach from a slightly different angle. It deals with arbitration procedures and says that

"The Secretary of State may give directions to the Corporation"

to introduce the scheme. Hon. Members have emphasised the word "may" and I shall not go further into that argument. There may also be a problem as to whether the corporation is the appropriate body to produce the scheme and proposals, given the problems that exist within its existing arbitration scheme.

The corporation claimed to establish its scheme from 1 January this year. On 21 December 1990 it put out a press release to say that the scheme, under the auspices of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, would be coming into operation. In fact, the corporation had been operating a scheme before that date. A constituent of mine, Mr. Briggs, had his case dealt with in a report produced in November 1990, although the scheme was supposed only to be starting on 1 January 1991. Problems with Mr. Briggs's case highlight the difficulties with the proposed arbitration scheme as a scheme that could be developed in future or one that might be acceptable for three or four years before something more substantial is introduced in its place.

Mr. Briggs lives in Franklin drive, Staveley, in Chesterfield. That is the address that suffers the coal mining subsidence problem. However, he lived elsewhere for two and a half years after the board moved him out. The board must believe that Mr. Briggs has caused it many difficulties and problems because he was terribly dissatisfied with the work that the board was carrying out.

The case went to arbitration only after a great deal of work had been carried out and the arbitration system functioned only in the board's interests. The scheme was that operated by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and it is the one that was supposed to begin from the start of this year. There are some slight differences in its terms, but it is almost an early draft of the scheme that was introduced in a tidied up form at the beginning of the year.

The arbitrator was Mr. M. D. Joyce of M. D. Joyce Associates, a firm of consultant geo-technical engineers. Whether they were the most appropriate people to conduct the arbitration is open to question as they do not seem to have had great expertise in bricks and mortar or the problems associated with the house as distinct from the geo-technical skills that Mr. Joyce undoubtedly possessed.

I received a letter from Mr. Briggs on 30 October in which he wrote:

"it seems to me that the arbitration 'cooked-up' between the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators does not permit a person of limited means to enter into Arbitration . . . This method of Arbitration rests, in the first instance, on documentary submissions by both parties and for most this would entail a complainant engaging professional assistance . . . In my case it has cost something approaching £900, so far."

Although it is stated in the board's arbitration scheme that costs are covered, that relates to the costs of employing the arbitrator and the work that the arbitrator carries out. The scheme does not cover the costs involved in preparing the claimant's submission.

In Mr. Briggs's case, the matters that had been in dispute for some time cost a considerable amount. Mr. Briggs claimed for 49 items totalling £5,407. In the end, he received £1,471 and he had to meet £900 costs in connection with the claim. Therefore, he received about 10 per cent. of the initial claim. That was said to be in full and final settlement of his claim. However, Mr. Briggs had sought a determination of the costs if the claim had been settled by payment rather than by work that the board was to carry out. Of 49 items, 28 were found in favour of the board and were the more costly items, and they averaged £141 each. One item was agreed—that is, that one third would be paid to Mr. Briggs—and 20 were found in his favour, and they averaged £73. I shall quote section 4.22 of the report to illustrate something about its nature. It concerns a claim for carpet fitting. The report states:

"The fitting of the carpet is poor but it has not been proved that it ever fitted properly."

The onus of proof being in the hands of the claimant rather than being left with the board has presented a great problem. The report goes on to state:

"Present gaps cannot be attributed to subsidence since the walls were not rebuilt in new positions."

That is an astonishing claim—one must have walls that have been rebuilt, rather than walls that have been repaired, and ground that had been disturbed for other reasons for there to be a genuine gap in the carpeting. The report goes on to state:

"Accordingly, I find in favour of the respondent and make no award to the claimant. There is, however, one vent plate still to be fitted, but this will be done at negligible cost."

Whatever that minor cost is, it is to be met by Mr. Briggs. Throughout the report similar provisions were challenged by Mr. Briggs. However, in the end he agreed, because of the pressures that the board began to put on him to make use of the arbitration system.

That arbitration system is now fully in place—Mr. Briggs has been used as a guinea pig—and the system is in danger of either being accepted under clause 41 or held up by clause 41. It is operating, and we are asked to see how it begins to pan out in the long run. I hope that the Committee will be careful about that matter. A host of similar measures are contained within the legislation. At the moment they are something we know not what. We may have a decent piece of legislation in the offing and it might be able to be bashed into shape in Committee, but it would be terrible if, in Committee, the Government got out the Whips, pushed the legislation, and claimed that they have produced something that answers the criticisms that have been made. We would then have a cosmetic provision that would not be much different from that which exists in law at the moment. The whole matter is yet to be played for.

I hope that the Minister has listened to the arguments and will say that this measure is merely an agenda for further legislation and that that legislation will be properly and fully considered.

10.58 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): I shall not attempt to repeat the points that my hon. Friends have made, because the hour is late and they have touched on many points in the Bill that are worthy of consideration in Committee. However, I shall mention one or two points that have not been mentioned. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) for the work that he has done on this matter since he came to the House in 1987 and his dedication in pushing for this legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and other hon. Members who sat on the Energy Select Committee and visited Mansfield, which is on the edge of my constituency, did a first-class job.

There is something about the Bill which has not been mentioned and which is rather peculiar. It was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech, for instance, despite promises that it would be. Now the Bill has suddenly been brought before the House. It makes one wonder whether the previous Prime Minister was against such a measure in view of her vendetta against the miners following the strike. Perhaps a change of Prime Minister has allowed the measure to be introduced. What is the reason for its suddenly being introduced? One reason is certain. At the bottom of page iv the Bill says:

"The Bill is not expected to have any significant effects on central government expenditure."

In other words, the Bill will not cost the Government a penny. Why the Bill could not have been introduced earlier if everyone knew that it would not cost the Government a penny, and why it has been introduced now, when the Government are in dire financial circumstances, has not been explained. But it is obvious to my way of thinking. If the Tory Government are re-elected at the next general election, one of the first things that they will do is sell off the coal mining industry.

Privatisation of the coal mining industry would be severely set back if potential buyers faced vast unknown expenditure on compensation for coal mining subsidence. People will be eager to buy the coal mining industry, not because of the coal under the ground, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) worked out is worth about 3p per tonne to a potential buyer, but for the vast acreage of land which British Coal owns. Many thousands, if not millions, of acres and many square miles of land owned by British Coal have planning permission for industrial development, all in ripe areas, where there is plenty of surplus labour. It will be a bonanza for any potential buyer unless there is a subsidence problem.

When pits have shut in my area—in Worksop near Mansfield—we have tried to bring in potential developers to build new factories. The one thing that terrifies potential developers is the word "subsidence". They run a mile, even if they are told that the building can be put on a raft, it will be a light pre-fabricated factory and only girls using sewing machines will be in the factory so there will be no weight on the area. As soon as they hear the word "subsidence" potential developers are off. That will be a great deterrent to anyone wanting to buy the land owned by the coal industry.

If the Conservatives win the next election they will build the two new ports at Killingholme and suck in imported coal from South Africa, Bolivia and Colombia which will finish off the British coal industry.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo *rose*——

Mr. Ashton: I give way to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), who has just come in.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I was here at the beginning of the debate, which is more than he was. He is overplaying the card of subsidence deterring developers coming into former mining areas. I do not know whether my constiutuency is unique. I do not think that it is. On the site of the Wilford pit there is now an industrial site which employs at least five to 10 times as many people as ever went down the pit. That is a massive industrial development. The Wollaton pit to which I referred in my speech has a 600-property housing estate on it. The hon. Gentleman is overplaying that card.

Mr. Ashton: The hon. Gentleman thinks that every pit is the same. I apologise for coming in late, but I had urgent constituency business to attend to. Some of us go to our constituencies and have things planned three weeks in advance. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, who represents a little piece of Nottingham, I represent 300 square miles and the 50 parish councils need a great deal of attention. I shall not respond to his remarks about Wilford or other such pits, because he represents a city area.

The reason why the Government have introduced the Bill and why it will not cost them anything is pretty apparent. They have made this move in case they win the next general election. I do not believe that they will but if they do and they want to privatise the pits, arrangements will be in place to compensate potential buyers. Who will pay British Coal? Has the measure been costed? Of course, it has not. I have not seen any estimate of the costs that British Coal will have to bear. I am willing to give way to the Minister or anyone who can say how many millions it is estimated that it will cost.

We all feel sorry for our poor constituents. Some of them have had a terrible time because of planning blight, which has prevented them from selling their houses. They come to my surgeries and ask me to take the matter up, but they beg me not to mention subsidence because they know that if it gets out that a certain street is affected they will not be able to sell their houses.

How many people face that problem, and how much will it cost? As my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield knows, our district council carried out a survey and sent out a questionnaire with the electoral registration form, asking, "Has your house got subsidence? Have you ever made a claim?"

Mr. Haynes: They did that in Ashfield.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the questionnaire was sent out in Ashfield and in Bolsover. It was sent to 37,000 houses. How much will compensation cost? A massive amount: if it were £1,000 per house, it would be £37 million. How many pits will that shut down? Will British Coal have to bear the whole cost? Those questions have not been fully considered, nor has the overall strategy and the economic consequences for British Coal.

[Mr. Ashton]

Another factor, about which I questioned the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, is that when my constituents buy their houses—whether from British Coal or from anyone else—and they get a mortgage from the Halifax, the Alliance and Leicester or some other building society, they are told that they have to insure the property. On top of £200 a month for a mortgage, they have to pay £30 for insurance. God knows why they pay insurance, because when they claim from the insurance company, it does not want to know. Insurance companies say that they are not covered for subsidence and landslip and tell them, the home owners, to read the small print as there is an exclusion clause. Insurance companies do not charge any less for insuring houses in a coal mining area, but they refuse to pay out. Even if it is proved that the pit does not run anywhere near the house—I know of such cases in Worksop—the insurance companies still say that the damage must have been caused by landslip and it is a well-known fact that they do not pay for that.

What have the Government done to get to grips with the insurance companies? Why is there nothing in the Bill to ensure that they are challenged before £37 million compensation is loaded on to the coal board which might shut some more pits? But the insurance companies will get away scot free. No one says a word to them. No one says that they have any responsibilities or that they should be taken to the insurance ombudsman. No one says that my constitutents should not have to pay as much insurance because the coal board will pay out.

Those major elements are missing from the Bill. There has been a conspiracy of silence between the Government and the insurance companies. Why is the Bill being brought in now? What will it cost? How many pits will shut down because of it? What damage will it do and what will be the economic consequences for British Coal? British Coal are not angels, but they are certainly not villains, as they have been portrayed.

I hope that in Committee we will get some of the answers to my questions. I hope that we will not pass a Bill without knowing what it will cost a nationalised industry, how many houses are involved and without any surveys. There have been no estimates of the costs involved. Someone has to pay and, because coal is a nationalised industry, Conservative Members do not give a damn. If British Coal has to pay millions of pounds in compensation it will shut more pits, and we must realise that before we start down this road.

11.9 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I am a little surprised at my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), who has poured cold water on the argument about mining subsidence and the way that it seriously affects the coal mining industry.

The Under-Secretary of State for Energy, who is here for this debate, is a nice young chap. He is learning fast about the coal mining industry. He will certainly learn fast in Committee. I can assure him that I will be one of the Opposition Members in Committee, arguing in favour of many of the provisions in the Bill, but also arguing—along with my colleagues—for certain amendments to the Bill, with a view to further improvements. That is not altogether satisfactory.

This issue came to light just before I first entered the House, and it has been argued about right up to the present day. We are led to believe that, at long last, the Government have got off their backside and are prepared to do something. I welcomed the Waddilove report. That committee did a first class job, and clearly stated that claimants were not getting a fair deal. The Government eventually took that report on board and accepted it. The then Secretary of State for Energy stood at the Dispatch Box and said so.

Even though the Waddilove report said wonderful things to the people in my constituency and those in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), we have been kicked from pillar to post. For years we have been asked at our surgeries, "What are you going to do about this problem?" People queue up to discuss their claims.

Only this morning I received a letter from a constituent whose claim had been rejected by the Coal Board, and that individual wants to know what action I will take. I informed him that we were to debate a Bill on the Floor of the House this evening that I hoped would sort out his problem. One issue that will confront the Under-Secretary in Committee is the situation in respect of people whose claims have been rejected in the past. There are many of them in my constituency, as there are in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield.

When Ian MacGregor's appointment as chairman of British Coal was announced, the then Secretary of State was the Member of Parliament for a Croydon constituency. What did he know about mining and subsidence? We warned him not to appoint MacGregor, because we knew what would happen. He caused a flipping strike right through the industry. He also got his consultants and advisers to examine the cost of mining subsidence. When the Government saw the figure, they said, "We'd better shove this over to the Energy Select Committee, to find out the real global picture."

Those of us who represent mining constituencies knew the real problem—not that Secretary of State from Croydon. Mr. Speaker is the Member of Parliament for a Croydon seat, and I also want to give him a warning—through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker plans to retire at some stage.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: So does the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Haynes: That is correct. I am retiring too, but this evening I am representing my constituents, because they have been given a raw deal. We are looking to the young Minister to give them a fair deal.

I think that we might win in Committee. There is obviously agreement across the Floor of the House that something must be done. At long last, the Government are prepared to do something. When we get Upstairs, we shall see how much.

I have advised Mr. Speaker that, when he retires, he should come to live in the beautiful county of Nottinghamshire. It is gorgeous. Mind you, Mr. Speaker passes by my constituency from time to time. In fact, he has accepted an invitation to visit the Royal British Legion in my constituency in June. He returns to that beautiful county. He often visits and stays the weekend with some friends. He travels the Nottinghamshire roads in his limousine with Robert, his driver. Being on those roads is like being at Blackpool on a switchback going up and

down—it is caused by mining subsidence. He has experienced mining subsidence on the Nottinghamshire roads. Until the problems and negotiations are sorted out, it will cost the county council a fortune to put things right on the roads.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw that a great deal of cost is involved, but there is also much suffering on the part of our constituents. An elderly lady of 82, who lived in a bungalow, came to my surgery. She and her husband, who had died, had spent all their lives saving so that they might own their own bungalow. They did not want to live in a local authority bungalow, although they were plentiful then, before the Tories came to power. She came to my surgery, told me that her bungalow had subsidence and asked me to help. I said, "Let me know about it, ducky." She explained the problem in detail.

The board said that it would not settle the claim because it was going to mine another, lower, seam under the bungalow. By the time the seam came through, eight years had gone by and the board rejected her claim. Similar incidents will occur with a six-year limit. We must clarify the six-year period in Committee.

When I became the Member of Parliament for Ashfield, having worked in that wonderful pit at Clipstone, just outside Mansfield, for 35 years, the National Coal Board in Nottinghamshire offered a fairer deal. The time limit for working things out with the Coal Board was not six years, but 12. But what happened? MacGregor was appointed chairman of the board, and he stopped that allowance straight away. There was fairness in Nottinghamshire, but that man from America—fancy appointing an American to run an industry in this country when we had people, including one in the House of Lords, who would have done a marvellous job—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name him!"] He was the former Member for Barnsley—now I have named him.

Mr. Ashton: Bernard Taylor?

Mr. Haynes: No, my hon. Friend has got it wrong there.

Those are the sorts of problems that we have in our constituences and that we want sorted out. I am sure that the Minister has listened to every contribution that has been made this afternoon, even from Conservative Members, who said that their constituents were not getting a fair deal. He has had his ear bashed today, and he will get it walloped in Committee if he does not take the right course. I have given the Minister fair warning. I have covered the issue of the board disqualifying a claim because it has been made after a certain period.

I have been to see some of the work done by the contractors that the Coal Board is supposed to have on a list. Local authorities could do the work, but the board appoint contractors—some of them are cowboys. We talk about residents having to be in a caravan in the front garden while their house is being repaired, but more often than not the contractor pushes off to do another job and leaves the residents in a caravan well into the winter. That is ridiculous and we want to get away from all that. I hope that the Bill will achieve that.

Hon. Members have talked about the board buying properties because they are so severely damaged. The board has paid the complainant compensation, he or she has been satisfied with the amount and accepted it—agents have been used, some of whom have made themselves millionaires. They have made a fortune—riding around in Rolls-Royces. I hope that we are going to get rid of that. The board, however, has been using the properties that it has bought as transit properties, which people can move into while their own properties are being done up. It should be encouraged to do much more than that, so that people do not suffer in the interim. We must look after the people whom we represent.

I am sorry that I have to mention the next point—individuals being refused by the board. The Minister said earlier that, if the board rejected the claim, the claimant had the right to go to the tribunal; but through the Secretary of State. What if the result is a heap of claims awaiting the OK from the Secretary of State? I am sure that you have experienced that yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have put questions to Ministers—including Secretaries of State—and have sometimes waited months for a reply. What if that happens with claimants whose cases have had to be referred to the Secretary of State?

The Secretary of State has not been in the job for long; he is an accountant, or something like that. He does not know anything about mining; he hasn't a flipping clue. He should come and talk to people like my colleagues and me, who know what mining and mining subsidence are about. We must speed up the process of referrals to the Secretary of State. Then we shall be getting somewhere—helping those poor people living out in our constituencies who have been suffering for so many years. What has been happening is scandalous.

I shall sit down in a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You need not look at your watch; there are four clocks here, and I can see them all. Do not worry about it. This debate is open-ended, by the way: you know what that means, Mr. Deputy Speaker. After all, you are experienced in this regard. You serve in a mining area, and there were many pits in your constituency in years gone by. You know what it is all about. You knew all about it when you were Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, and spoke from that Dispatch Box. You knew what the workers had to go through in mining and other heavy industries. I thought that you had a problem with Doncaster racecourse at one time, but I understand that the hot weather caused that problem rather than mining subsidence. Well, we have overcome that problem, have we not?

In the 15 years in which I worked for Nottinghamshire county council—and even before—it had a system called Clasp. I think that the hon. Members for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) will know about that, because they know how local authorities work. The council built many schools and elderly people's homes that were able to take the movement of land, especially when it was due to mining subsidence. It built the properties throughout the county—right out in the mining areas. They could stand the movement, which was a good thing: we sent salesmen to foreign parts, and they were flogging them like nobody's business. The same kind of progress and advancement could be used in the mining areas. Nottinghamshire county council—Labour-controlled, of course—has given everyone a lead.

I hope that the Bill will not be long in Committee—I am sure that the Minister will agree—and that the right things will be in it, in the interests of the people whom we serve.

Here comes the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste)—and he has only just walked in!

11.24 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me now that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) has subsided into his seat. I apologise to the House for not being present for the bulk of the debate. I had to attend to some pressing constituency matters. I shall be extremely brief and take up a small fraction of the time taken by the hon. Member for Ashfield.

It is important to place on record the fact that the Bill has the widest possible cross-party support of hon. Members in mining constituencies from one end of the country to the other. Families can have few more distressing experiences than to have the quality of their home and home life destroyed by subsidence. Many of the technical problems of the past have led to long and distressing delays and great difficulties in achieving fairness.

On behalf of my hon. Friends from Yorkshire, I congratulate the Government on bringing forward a Bill which will address serious practical problems. The onus of proof is now firmly on British Coal and people will be able to bring in outside contractors if they are unhappy about delays caused by British Coal. Plainly, it is important for the Bill's details to be right, and that will be determined in Committee. I again congratulate the Government on an important measure which will improve the quality of life of many people.

11.26 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) explained why he could not be present for the whole of the debate and he congratulated the Government. His congratulations are a trifle premature. It would have been more appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to express gratitude to the Government for presenting the House with an opportunity to put right a matter that has caused problems for a long time.

As the Minister knows, we do not intend to divide the House, but that does not mean that we do not have deep reservations about some aspects of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) has announced his retirement, but the energy and vigour with which he spoke show that he will not go out with a whimper. There are some bangs left, and no doubt we shall hear a few in Committee if the Minister does not pay heed not merely to the suggestions of my hon. Friends, but to some of the pointed criticisms of Conservative Members. We have taken careful note of those criticisms and we trust that Conservative Members will join us in Committee to see to it that the improvements that their constituents and ours want to see are embodied in the Bill.

I want to be brief, but I need a little time to refer to some of the issues that have been raised. While we welcome the opportunity provided by the Bill, some hon. Members pointed to the rather protracted period that has elapsed since the subject was first raised. Some hon. Members were deeply concerned about the matter before I entered the House in 1970. Concern has been growing for years and it is a pity that such a Bill was not presented to the House three or four years ago.

I am especially grateful to the Select Committee for building on the recommendations in the Waddilove report to the point where the Government could no longer ignore the issue. I shall not go into great detail because close scrutiny is a matter for the Committee. Before the Minister makes his winding-up speech, perhaps he would look at paragraph 12 of the Government's response to the Select Committee report. It says:

"cases where claims have been rejected on grounds of time limits could be referred to the new voluntary arbitration procedure."

That needs to be set against the six-year proposal and the Minister may feel disposed to comment on that in his winding-up speech. If not, we shall certainly feel it necessary—as I hope Conservative Members will—to pursue the matter in Committee.

The Minister referred to the principle embodied in the slogan "The polluter pays". That is a slogan which both parties have voiced for a long time, but it seems to me that it has been accepted uncritically by Conservative Members. For that reason I want to refer briefly to the speech of the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward), who referred to subsidence and pollution from ancient mining operations. Not only are maps and plans of such antiquity unavailable; we do not even know who owned the mines. It may be argued that subsidence from collieries and, indeed, coalfields that had closed, or were approaching closure, before the passage of the nationalisation legislation of 1947 ought not to be a burden on the British coal industry as it makes enormous efforts to survive and succeed. It is all very well to make the polluter pay, but absolute reliance on that principle can have dangers. A polluter who has been dead for several hundred years cannot be made to pay.

There is another aspect of Government policy to which we should turn. If the polluter lacks the means to pay—if he becomes bankrupt, if his business folds, as so many businesses are folding now—who will compensate the community? Who will make up for the pollution? Excessive reliance on a slogan, without any detailed consideration, can be dangerous. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that matter before the Committee stage starts.

Very little has been said about the proposals to provide compensation for farmers. I am amazed that two Conservative Members from Nottinghamshire devoted their attention to their constituents rather than to their agricultural interests. They may feel that the Bill will assist them to retain their seats. However, if, in Committee, they do not support amendments to which they appear to have been giving credence, we shall ensure that they are more dependent on the farms. If they fail to support us in Committee, that factor will loom increasingly large.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) gave a detailed analysis of the Bill. Several hon. Members have paid very full tribute to him for the considerable amount of work that he has done. He referred to COALS, the local authority organisation which has done a great deal of work. I invite Conservative Members who may serve on the Standing Committee to look very carefully indeed at the balanced and informative material that that organisation has provided. I hope that it will help to determine some votes on the amendments that are necessary.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and several of my hon. Friends, including the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), referred to the almost inevitable weaknesses of the unrefined arbitration system that looks likely to emerge. I suggest that the Minister pays particular attention to the

case of Mr. Briggs from Staveley. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield made the point that society and the industrial base are changing. He feels that people may now be more prepared to speak up against the interests of the large coal industry in order to defend their rights as individuals. There may be some truth in that.

The most important reference to current developments came from my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands). In effect—these are not his exact words—he said, "If we can't have the money, we in the coalfields are not going to have the muck." The problems in south Wales and in areas like mine in south Yorkshire have been sufficiently oppressive to convince us that we must press for environmental decency. Environmental decency means not compelling people to suffer the unfairness—sometimes protracted unfairness—and hardship caused by subsidence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), in referring, quite properly, to the work of the Select Committee on Energy, said that the evidence given to it showed that compensation for subsidence was about 1·5 per cent. of British Coal's total costs. We are not talking about vast sums that would cripple that industry. My hon. Friend also made it clear that we are not criticising the officials of British Coal who have to administer the costs.

Mr. Allen McKay: Subsidence payments went in three stages. The first was the learning stage, the second was when the then National Coal Board was extremely generous, so much so that some buildings were improved, and the third was when purse strings were tightened. That stage coincided with the decision to move the levy on coal into a global sum and for each pit to pay for local damage. That was a terrible mistake.

Mr. Hardy: It was a mistake and it was dangerous, given some of the people at the top of British Coal, to make each colliery pay such costs. That sometimes assisted them to close a colliery rather earlier than it should have been closed. We should make it clear that the people carrying out these responsible tasks in British Coal are not being singled out for criticism. To illustrate the point, I can quote a constituency case of mine, particularly as the individual involved did not support my party. One of my constituents savagely criticised British Coal for not being kind and helpful in dealing with his demands for substantial compensation for subsidence. The reply of the British Coal officer concerned took the rather unusual form of sending a copy of my constituent's letter complaining about the damage that subsidence had done to his house and demanding money from British Coal together with the estate agent's blurb, which said that his house was a wonderful mansion in perfect condition. In those circumstances, I did not feel disposed to criticise the staff of British Coal in my area.

The area that I represent has had coal mining under it for up to 340 years, and has suffered mightily. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) spoke about the effect of subsidence on a dairy farmer in his constituency, but I recall that, as a result of subsidence in my constituency, he once had to rescue a cow—rather an amusing story.

Mr. Allen McKay: I was a retained fireman when a shallow seam subsided. That was when I saw three cows underground.

Mr. Hardy: That was due to a decision made by the National Coal Board as it then was, when I served on the local authority. It told the council that it was essential that it mined the Melton field from Wath main colliery and that, although it was a shallow seam, the quality of the coal was desperately needed in the national interest. The board assured us that it would do its best to ensure that there was adequate compensation. The local authority agreed that mining should begin. Within days, houses had begun to collapse, and within a short time the council had to rehouse what were significant numbers of people for a relatively small authority. We received a letter from a lady who complained about the foul language being used by workers whom she could hear from her dining room while they were working underground extracting coal. We were naturally able to assure her that no miners at Wath main colliery indulged in strong language, but that helped us to put a case to British Coal for adequate compensation for our community.

However, that community was hurt. As some of my hon. Friends have said, distress and trauma—the Minister used the word trauma—are caused when people have to leave their homes for months or when housewives who are proud of their homes find them in semi-dereliction, as a result of which they have to move into less satisfactory or smaller accommodation, without even knowing when they can return to the home that they have cared for for many years.

As some hon. Members have suggested, if such problems occurred in some of the more salubrious parts of the country, the Bill might have come before us a little sooner. We have, of course, shared the anxiety that has been expressed about the channel tunnel, and especially by those in Kent. We hope that those who have voiced their concern about matters that affect the more salubrious areas of the south-east will not object if the Minister decides to accept some of the sensible amendments to the Bill that have been recommended by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I could pay tribute to several hon. Members who have spoken and to whom I have not referred. I apologise to those I have not mentioned. I feel, however, that the argument advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) should not escape attention. We suspect that the Government feel that it is necessary to legislate on subsidence in coal mining areas to facilitate the privatisation of the mining industry. They feel that there are areas where loot can be garnered.

There are Conservative Members who know a great deal about the mining industry and they might join us in urging caution before there is any hasty removal of the industry from public control. If we do not have a substantial and significant body such as British Coal that is charged with properly fulfilling its responsibilities in matters of the sort that we are discussing, those responsibilities may not be fulfilled. The problems to which we have pointed have made it necessary for the Minister carefully to consider how the Bill, which my right hon. and hon. Friends welcome in principle, can be made welcome in the coal pits.

11.42 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the debate.

We have debated the Bill for nearly five hours and I am grateful to hon. Members for the general support that it has received. Naturally, some aspects of it have attracted criticism. I believe that in part some of the criticisms rest on a misunderstanding of certain clauses, and perhaps are coloured by problems in dealing with events in the past.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), in his opening remarks, dwelt on the so-called six-year rule. I agree that this has suffered from various interpretations over the years. The 1957 legislation provided for only a two-months time limit and the 1975 legislation included no specific time limit. I agree with the Select Committee on Energy that at some stage British Coal should be able to close its books on a claim. We wish, however, to achieve a balance by giving householders a considerable time in which to lodge claims. I repeat and emphasise that the date of the original mining is not relevant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) mentioned the difficulties that have been experienced in old coalfields. I know that the Kingswood miners were famous in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Radstock coalfield covered my constituency, although the last pit there, New Rock, shut in 1968. I have some experience, however, of the difficulties caused by old coal mines. I am aware that the mining techniques of those days can delay subsidence for a considerable period. That is why the six-year period runs not from the date of mining, not even from the date of damage to a house, but from the date when the claimant becomes aware of the damage. The Bill places the onus on British Coal to prove that damage was not caused by subsidence, which removes the ambiguities that have clouded dealings between claimants, hon. Members and the coal board.

Several hon. Members referred to the arbitration scheme. British Coal's voluntary scheme has been in operation for only a month. It is designed to offer quick, informal and expensive——

Mr. Rowlands: Inexpensive.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I apologise. I meant quick, informal and inexpensive settlement of disputes. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) mentioned difficult constituency cases that were almost tailor-made for settlement under such an arbitration scheme. We shall review the operation of the scheme later in the year, at which time changes and extensions to it may be appropriate.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), who has made a notable contribution to the subject. He expressed concern that British Coal could refuse arbitration. I draw his attention to clause 40(4)(a), which specifies that under a scheme approved by the Secretary of State British Coal will not only be bound by arbitration but will have to offer it. We shall discuss that further in Committee, but the fact that that regulation can be made will be a clear incentive for British Coal to operate its voluntary scheme reasonably and constructively.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My hon. Friend referred to clause 41(4)(a), which says:

"While it is in force, a scheme approved under subsection (2) above—

(a) shall have effect, in relation to any dispute to which it relates, as a binding offer of arbitration".

Is my hon. Friend suggesting that the scheme that began last month will be approved under the Bill or that another scheme will be put in its place if that scheme does not work out?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I should correct the clause number: it is clause 41(4)(a). It may or may not be the scheme approved. If it needs to be extended and modified, it will be, but it is sensible to start off with a voluntary scheme and to see whether it is, in principle, a satisfactory way of resolving disputes and whether it will evolve into a scheme that is satisfactory to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and, indeed, to the House.

Stop notices were mentioned. The hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) was concerned that British Coal can delay claims against it almost indefinitely. He would agree that, in principle, provision for stop notices is sensible. There is no point in repairing a house if it is to suffer almost immediate further damage from prospective mining. Under the Bill, stop notices must be reviewed every 12 months and lifted as soon as damage is not likely to occur in the next 18 months.

The hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) asked who would pay when pits closed. That is an obligation on British Coal as a whole, but it is right, where possible, to stick to the principle that individual pits are responsible for subsidence that their activities cause. That is why I am against a general levy which would disguise that fact. There should be a clear incentive on individual pits and, indeed, on individual pit faces to reduce damage caused by subsidence.

Mr. Lofthouse: In 1985, there were eight pits in my constituency; today there is only one. There will be arguments in constituencies such as mine about which pit caused subsidence—a working pit or a pit which has closed. If the costs of closed pits are imposed on a working pit, it could become unprofitable and liable to closure.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I was going to come to the general burden on the industry.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) will know that in British Coal's most recently published accounts there is a provision of £243 million to cover subsidence damage. British Coal has anticipated most of the measures in the Bill and made provision accordingly. It could well be that that sum will be adequate to cover the financial obligations in the Bill. The Bill is needed whether or not the coal industry is in the public or the private sector.

We do not wish needlessly to burden British Coal with huge financial obligations regardless of cost. That could increase the price of coal, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) said. We must be alive to the danger that we could cripple the industry. However, we want to specify the fair obligations on British Coal and clearly set out the corresponding rights of householders.

All hon. Members have welcomed the emphasis in the Bill on repair rather than compensation. Some of the difficulties mentioned may have arisen out of comparatively generous compensation payments which were taken by some people and not used to repair their homes, which

were sold to new purchasers who then found that the claim had been settled and that there was no way of getting money from British Coal to undertake the repairs.

The Bill is the culmination of much consultation with interested parties. It recognises that deep mining causes subsidence. We want a means of dealing with the undoubted pain and stress that subsidence can cause to individual householders, those in business, farmers and property owners. We will do that by carrying forward existing codes of practice, the best from the two main Acts of Parliament and the pre-notification requirements, and by insisting on timely repairs, the payment of reasonable expenses, the creation of a fair disputes procedure and many other items mentioned in the Bill.

This is a welcome Bill. It is a good Bill and, no doubt, in Committee we will make it even better.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Food Protection

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 20), dated 10th January 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (England) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 6), dated 10th January 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (Wales) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 5), dated 10th January 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS) BILL

Ordered,

That it be an Instruction to Standing Committee B that it have power to amend the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill so as to make, in relation to the whole of the United Kingdom, provision for and in connection with the exercise of investigation powers by persons other than constables.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

River Cart (Flooding)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

11.55 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I very much regret the necessity for this debate, and my regret is in no way related to the hour. I regret the fact that many of my constituents in the Langside and Battlefield districts of Glasgow are placed in a state of fear each time heavy and sustained rainfall occurs; in a caring society, that should surely not be allowed to happen. The second reason for my regret is the negative response that I have received to my letters on the subject, from both the Minister who is to reply and from the other Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton).

On 6 October, the latest serious flooding of the White Cart river occurred in the district to which I referred. Three days later, having visited the areas and having spoken to families who had been forced to leave their homes, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Scotland. On 22 October, I received a reply from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West declining my request that he should visit the affected areas to see for himself the effect of the damage.

On 9 December, I wrote to the Minister who has responsibility for local government asking to meet him to discuss the matter along with the elected representatives on Glasgow district and Strathclyde regional council. Five weeks and several promptings later, I finally received a response in which the Minister declined to attend such a meeting. I therefore had no alternative but to seek this Adjournment debate to put my case to the Minister.

White Cart water rises to the south-west of the city of Glasgow between Eaglesham and East Kilbride. It flows through much of the south side of the city. After some 22 miles, it joins the Black Cart near Glasgow airport and then flows into the River Clyde at Renfrew.

There is a long history of flooding in much of the area through which the White Cart flows—most notably in Cathcart, Langside and Shawlands. Records dating back to 1908 suggest serious flooding in those districts on at least 16 occasions. That represents a frequency of once every five years.

During the early hours of 1 January 1984, flooding from the White Cart water caused extensive inundation, resulting in widespread disruption and affecting almost 500 homes and business premises in the Battlefield and Langside area. Water levels rose with exceptional speed —in some areas at more than 1 m per hour. Unfortunately, only 12 days later, on 13 January 1984, an almost identical flood occurred in the same area, with similar results.

That month was clearly exceptional but floods of a similar or greater magnitude had occurred in August 1920, January 1932, October 1959 and September 1962. Even though the average period between the most serious instances of flooding is around 10 years, there are many instances of floods which were less serious but which none the less forced residents to evacuate their homes. Overall, the interval between successive flooding of all categories has ranged from 12 days to 17 years. That illustrates a further problem—the sheer unpredictability of such events.

[Mr. Mike Watson]

The last serious flooding occurred on the night of 5 October 1990. More than 200 families in my constituency had to abandon their homes as precautions that included moving furniture upstairs and placing sandbags against doors and windows proved quite inadequate to stem the flood waters. Some homes were flooded to a depth of 2 ft, and it is estimated that resultant insurance claims will exceed £2 million.

It is not difficult to imagine the despair felt by families in such circumstances. Their fear and anxiety at times of heavy or prolonged rainfall are distressing enough even when the river remains contained. Think how much worse it must be when the high water flows over retaining walls, flooding gardens, streets and houses. Property is damaged, often beyond repair. Families are forced to flee their homes, leaving possessions behind. It is usually many weeks after the water has receded before a return is possible and even then it is far from a return to normality.

Last month I witnessed events. On the evening of 1 January, a matter of weeks after the October floods, residents in Melbrae crescent and Woodfed street, which are regularly the areas worst affected by flooding in my constituency, were visited by police and warned that the White Cart was rising to dangerous levels. They were issued with sandbags. Fortunately, that was a false alarm and the water subsided two or three inches below the limits of the retaining walls. However, it was a close-run thing and yet another distressing occasion for residents. When I visited several of those residents the following day, they showed what I thought was remarkable self-restraint in the circumstances. I was struck by the fact that none of them had carpets in their homes. The explanation was simple: their floorboards had not dried out following the October flooding.

I have several distressing letters from constituents about the flooding, and I want to refer to one from Mrs. Margaret Morran of 450 Tantallon road. She lives in a sheltered complex for the elderly and she wrote to me about the night in October when the floods came, stating:

"I was terrified as I watched the waters rising at the back of the house where the Cart flows and the front—in Tantallon Road . . . the residents . . . cannot take any more, people afraid of the future, afraid for themselves, afraid for their homes, afraid of the next downpour of rain, afraid to go to bed when they hear it—like myself!

What do we do, and the many people here who are over eighty years of age, when we hear a warning signal? Where do we go from a one-roomed house situated on the ground floor? Something must be done immediately."

She is absolutely right. Those people and many others are in a quite intolerable situation that cannot be allowed to continue.

The problem is becoming even more acute as the years pass. It will come as no surprise to anyone to learn that Glasgow has by far the highest rainfall in Scotland. However, as I said, it is getting worse. Between 1950 and 1980, Glasgow's average rainfall was 950 mm. In 1985 it was over 1,100 mm and last year it was more than 1,200 mm. Last year Glasgow also had its wettest three months since records began, with measurable rain for 70 consecutive days, culminating in the dreadful events of 5 and 6 October to which I referred a few moments ago.

What can be done about it? The Minister and his colleagues have written to me saying that responsibility lies with Strathclyde regional council and, strictly speaking, that is the case. The Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 gave discretionary powers to local authorities to carry out flood prevention schemes to protect non-agricultural land. Eight years ago, the duty to warn of flooding—although, interestingly, not to prevent it—was passed to river boards in Scotland. The Clyde river purification board has just announced its decision to spend £96,000 on a computerised early warning system for the Cart. That is fine so far as it goes, but it does not go nearly far enough. It addresses the symptoms and not the cause of the problem.

The responsibility may rest technically with Strathclyde regional council, but how realistic is it to expect the authority to deal with the problem of the White Cart in the foreseeable future? For the Scottish Office to answer pleas for assistance with, "Go tell it to Strathclyde region," is disingenuous at best. The regional council's sewerage department had a project expenditure for 1990-91 of £26·5 million and the projected figure for 1991-92 is £30·1 million. The increase will be entirely eaten up by existing projects.

Nor can the region be accused of ignoring the problem of the White Cart. With regard to one of the Cart's feeders, the Broch burn, which has been a constant source of floods for a long time in the Pollok area, the Strathclyde regional council has committed £2·7 million this year for a flood relief scheme. It is also spending money on the Pollok relief sewer. At the same time, to expect the regional council to allocate in excess of £10 million for a scheme for the White Cart is not just unreasonable; it seriously underestimates the scale of the problem.

In 1987, the region commissioned a report from a firm of consulting engineers in Glasgow called Babtie, Shaw and Morton. It was asked to report on the flooding of the Cart and to recommend a solution. It produced a plan that involved the introduction of a flood storage scheme, the creation of flood plains and the construction of walls and embankments up to 2·5 m high. The estimated cost was in excess of £6 million, with another £2 million-plus needed to cover consequential effects downriver. That report was never acted upon, because the regional council faced greater priorities, largely as a result of the enhanced standards that it is required to meet in terms of water and sewerage.

It must be stressed that flood prevention is a discretionary, not statutory, requirement of the regional council. At present, Strathclyde regional council is involved in pruning £20 million from its current budget to meet Government-induced expenditure cuts and shortfalls in poll tax revenue. That involves cutting into budgets relating to its statutory duties, including education and social work, and it forms part of what will be a massive £60 million cut over the next two years.

The councillors are in an impossible situation—they are damned by the public if they do, and damned by the Secretary of State if they do not. When the region, the largest local authority in Britain, is unable to meet its statutory requirements, how can the Minister tell me that it should be prioritising discretionary duties? It simply has nothing to spare. Any attempt to point the finger at the regional council is buck-passing by the Government.

In my exchange of letters with Scottish Office Ministers, I have been advised that

"exchequer grants of up to 30 per cent. would be available to the regional council for flood prevention schemes."

That is well known, but, if a suitable scheme cost even a modest £10 million—that is in 1987 figures, so it will clearly be more than that—it would leave the regional council needing to raise £7 million itself, and it simply cannot do it. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West offered advice in an even more tongue-in-cheek fashion, when he wrote to me in October:

"Authorities have flexibility to anticipate future capital allocations by up to 10 per cent. and are generally free to transfer funds between programmes to meet their assessment of overall priorities. In addition, capital allocations can be enhanced by generating capital receipts through the disposal of surplus assets, and capital expenditure can be financed from current revenue without being recorded against the capital allocations."

In other words: "Sell off the family silver, but don't look to us to help you." That will not wash with my constituents. There may even be EC funding available, but the bottom line is clearly that, unless the Government and the Scottish Office make special funding available, nothing will change in the foreseeable future.

I am well aware that other parts of Scotland are afflicted with flood-related problems, and my arguments this evening are in no sense to be taken as detracting from their needs. However, I was sent here to fight for the people of Glasgow, Central, and the pressing need now is for the Scottish Office to join that fight. As the House knows, countless millions were made available for the Thames flood barriers. Will the Scottish Office fight its corner for Glasgow as vigorously as the Government were prepared to fight for London? If not, why not?

Hundreds of constituents are living in houses that they cannot sell and are surrounded by furniture and possessions that they cannot insure. In desperation, following last October's floods a packed meeting of residents in Langside hall decided to form the White Cart Flooding Association. They have already set up a fighting fund, distributed petitions and written to the Scottish Office and to Strathclyde regional council. They deserve the right to live their lives free from anxiety, and only special funding from the Scottish Office will bring them peace of mind. In his letter to me, dated 16 January, the Minister said that he had "every sympathy" with those who had suffered distress and damage to property. They do not want sympathy; they want action, and I mean to see that they get it.

12.7 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) on having secured this Adjournment debate on behalf of his constituents, and I am glad to respond to it.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the severity of the effects of the flooding that occurred on Saturday 6 October. There is no dispute about the severity of what happened. As he said, many properties, businesses and roads in the Cathcart, Battlefield, Langside and Shawlands areas of Glasgow were inundated with floodwater from the White Cart water. The hon. Gentleman said that, in certain parts of the flooded area, residents had to be evacuated—indeed, elderly residents had to be evacuated from their houses by boat. Hon. Members will agree that that must have been a disturbing experience. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have every sympathy for all those who were affected by the flooding.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in paying tribute to the emergency services for the assistance which they provided on that occasion. The police issued the warning to which the hon. Gentleman referred and assisted with the evacuation of properties. The fire brigade also assisted people. The local authorities mobilised squads of workmen with lorries and sandbags to reduce the effects of the water. Three reception centres were set up and the housing office was open for temporary accommodation. In the event, however, I understand that few people remained in the reception areas overnight.

The response to the emergency is unlikely to have been made any easier by the fact that the flood reached its peak at about midday on the Saturday. Undoubtedly, that is a factor which the emergency services will have considered when assessing whether any improvements could be made to their procedures.

I assure the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central that officials in my Department have discussed what happened with officials in Strathclyde regional council and officials from the Scottish Office have visited the area to see the position for themselves.

As the hon. Gentleman told the House, the beginning of October was a particularly wet period in Scotland. Although, within 20 km both north and south of Glasgow, the rainfall was barely noteworthy on 5 and 6 October, in the White Cart water catchment area, rainfall of more than 2 in was recorded between the evening of 5 October and early afternoon on 6 October. That rainfall, falling on an already saturated catchment area, resulted in a rapid run-off, generating a flood in the river, which passed through Cathcart during the morning and afternoon of 6 October. The hon. Gentleman spoke of the severity of the flood. I confirm that, at its peak, the flood was the third highest recorded, both upstream of the affected area at the Overlee gauging station established in 1981, and downstream at the Hawkhead gauging station, where records are available from 1964.

As the hon. Gentleman said, there is a long history of flooding in the areas. It is not a new problem. He said that records dating back to 1908 show that serious flooding has occurred on at least 16 occasions. My notes say 17, but we can broadly agree that there is a considerable history of serious flooding. In addition, observations suggest that minor flooding in the built-up areas occurs at least once every two years on average.

The interval between floods is extremely variable. To give the House one example, in January 1984, two major floods occurred within 12 days, whereas no serious flooding is recorded during the long period between 1932 and 1959—over a quarter of a century. That illustrates the unpredictability of such events.

The hon. Gentleman rightly focused on his case for flood prevention measures to improve protection against future flooding in the area. I am sure that the House has every sympathy with the sentiments that he expressed on behalf of his worried constituents. I assure him that the Scottish Office is aware of the desire for action. However, I must emphasise—this is not a technical but a real point—that the body with statutory powers for flood prevention—as he said, discretionary powers—is not the Scottish Office but Strathclyde regional council.

The council has wide powers under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 to take such measures as it sees fit to prevent or mitigate flooding of non-agricultural land in its area. To record the powers in detail,

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

the council may maintain or improve any watercourse in its area. In particular, section 4 of the Act provides that, apart from maintenance and management operations, flood prevention schemes made by the council must be approved by the Secretary of State.

It is at that point that the Secretary of State formally enters the decision-making process. However, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, in all fairness, will recognise that progress is therefore dependent in the first instance upon decisions made by the council. I give the hon. Member an assurance that any scheme for flood prevention on the White Cart water put forward by Strathclyde will receive serious consideration, but first, in the light of all the circumstances, the council has to decide what a flood prevention scheme would entail and whether it wishes to proceed with such a scheme. That is a right and proper procedure for it to undertake, and no one can criticise it for proceeding in that way. I do not criticise the council, as I think that the hon. Gentleman alleged I was going to.

The council was fully aware of the problems of flooding from the White Cart. Indeed, as the hon. Member told the House, it commissioned a firm of consulting engineers to study and report on possible flood alleviation measures, following the serious flooding in January 1984. That report contained a number of recommendations. For example, it recommended the construction of flood walls and embankments between Cathcart and Pollokshaws. The proposal was to build the works to a level which would provide protection against a flood with a theoretical return period of not less than 50 years. As the hon. Member told the House, at that time, the cost was estimated at £6 million, which at today's prices would exceed £10 million.

At that time, a similar investigation was carried out by the consultants in respect of the Brock burn and Levern water. I should perhaps declare a personal interest in Levern water, as it passes in front of my house, although rather further upstream. The report identified flood prevention measures that would provide protection against the one in 100-year flood, which were estimated to cost about £1·25 million.

I understand that Strathclyde regional council is currently preparing detailed proposals for a flood prevention scheme on the Brock burn and Levern water and has made provision in its financial plan for expenditure of £2·7 million over the period 1992-94. Those proposals will no doubt be widely welcomed by the local community.

The hon. Member mentioned resources. As he will know, flood prevention comes within the Scottish water and sewerage capital expenditure programmes. Provision for that programme has been substantially increased in recent years. For example, in the 1989 public expenditure survey, the programme was set at more than £500 million for the three-year period 1990-91 to 1992-93. The hon. Member will also know that, as part of the 1990 survey, the Government recently announced another substantial increase in resources. For 1991-92, the investment level for the water and sewerage programme has been set at £167 million, rising to £238 million in 1993-94. The three-year programme now totals more than £620 million. The figure of £238 million for 1993-94 is two-thirds higher than the provision for the current year, and more than double the level for 1988-89.

That increased provision takes account of the needs identified by regional councils in their financial plans. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the provision already announced to Strathclyde broadly meets the programme that the council has submitted. As I said to the hon. Gentleman, if Strathclyde regional council were to decide to promote a flood prevention scheme for the White Cart water and to make provision in its financial plan, it would receive serious consideration. I confirm to the hon. Gentleman that if such a proposal were to come forward, at that stage, of course, I would be happy to meet the hon. Member and a delegation from his constituency, if he thought that that would be helpful. However, we do not have a scheme before us, and it is for the council to decide whether or not it wants to promote one. Priorities and the timing of projects are matters for the council to decide.

As to the provision for Strathclyde, that has risen from £45 million in 1989-90 to a provisional allocation of £71 million for 1991-92—and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the final 1992-93 allocation will be at least the provisional figure.

The hon. Gentleman quoted a letter from the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), pointing out that authorities have flexibility in determining available resources, which is a point of some importance. Authorities can, in the light of their own priorities, make a limited switch of resources between various blocks of expenditure—and they can also fund capital projects from current revenue without that counting against their capital allocations.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that special funding should be made available to Strathclyde for the specific purpose of a flood prevention scheme on the White Cart. As he knows, capital allocations are not granted for specific schemes, because it is for councils to determine their own priorities according to local needs. Any departure from that approach would limit the discretion presently available to local authorities.

That general approach has been consistently supported by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—which, rightly, wants to defend that discretion and has not wanted to go down the road of earmarked funds for particular capital projects, as that would undermine the discretion that they can apply.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that, under flood prevention legislation, Exchequer grants are already available to regional councils. In the case of Strathclyde, the grant would be 30 per cent. of the eligible costs of an improved scheme.

I dwelt at some length on the powers and flexibility that regional councils have in commissioning flood protection works. However, I readily acknowledge that, even if Strathclyde decided to go ahead now with a White Cart scheme, there would be a lengthy planning and construction period, and residents would continue to feel apprehensive every time there was heavy rain and the river started to rise.

Of immediate benefit will be an advance warning system, which would allow appropriate action to be taken. The hon. Gentleman referred to the decision by Clyde river purification board, in response to strong representations made by him and by councillors, including Councillor

James Shields, to implement a flood warning system for the White Cart water. Work on the instrumentation of that complex catchment and development of a mathematical model is proceeding. Final commissioning of the system will take about a year.

Meanwhile, the availability of improved information about rainfall and catchment response from the new instrumentation should allow for much better advance warning of possible flooding. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that is a positive measure and one which will be welcomed by his constituents. I congratulate him on taking this opportunity to put his constituents' concerns before the House. I give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that if, after taking account of all its priorities, Strathclyde regional council decides to bring forward a flood prevention scheme for the White Cart water, I shall be happy to discuss it personally with the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, if he wishes.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Powered Wheelchairs

1. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the provision of powered wheelchairs; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): We have received a number of representations about the provision of indoor and outdoor powered wheelchairs.

Mr. Thurnham: After the success of the pilot schemes in Manchester and Newcastle, will my hon. Friend make sure that sufficient funds are available to maintain national progress? Will he see what can be done to reduce the very high costs of powered wheelchairs?

Mr. Dorrell: As my hon. Friend knows, it was always the intention that the services that are currently run by the Disablement Services Authority should be transferred to health authorities with effect from April this year. We have set in place arrangements that will ring-fence the funding that is currently granted to the Disablement Services Authority for two years, to ensure that, in the immediate aftermath of the transfer, the real level of provision will be maintained.

Mr. Frank Field: Does the Minister think it fair that some of the most disabled people in Birkenhead are those who are least likely to get a powered wheelchair? If he does not think that that is fair, what will he do about it?

Mr. Dorrell: What we are doing about it is that, from April, the local health authority will have the resources available to make a properly prioritised decision about the way in which those resources should be used. It will be for the hon. Gentleman to take up that matter with his local health authority to ensure that the people who need such services have them provided.

Mr. Atkinson: Will my hon. Friend take advantage of this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the various associations for the disabled and the St. John Ambulance brigade, whose work makes the lives of those who rely on wheelchairs much more normal?

Mr. Dorrell: I am happy to take the opportunity that my hon. Friend presents to pay tribute to the role of the voluntary agencies in this and many other matters related to health. It is right also to take this opportunity to draw attention to the valuable work that has been done by the Disablement Services Authority, which was set up by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he held a different brief. It has made a substantial improvement in the efficiency with which resources are used to the benefit of the patients who use such services.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Is not it the general view, after the pilot experiments in Manchester and Newcastle, that the Government's offer of £1 million in response to the DSA's request for £10 million is woefully inadequate? After all, we are talking here about independent living for people who would otherwise have to rely on much more expensive institutional care. Will powered wheelchairs be available for casualties from the Gulf if, ultimately, they can be of help?

Mr. Dorrell: The decision on the provision of a powered wheelchair for an individual patient will be for health authorities and clinicians. From April, the £112 million budget for disablement services—the provision of wheelchairs and of artificial limbs—will be transferred to local health authorities so that they can use the resources in a way that reflects local priorities. That seems to be the most effective way of ensuring that resources are well used.

District Health Funding

2. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he is giving to regional health authorities about the time scale to be adopted in transferring the funding of districts to the capitation system; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): All regional health authorities have submitted details of their proposals for achieving funding based on weighted capitation at district level. We are analysing the method and pace of change proposed by the regions and will be formulating a national policy and timetable shortly.

Mr. Taylor: As authorities such as Southend, which has traditionally been woefully underfunded, were looking forward to the new Government proposals that would give them a fairer deal, is my right hon. Friend aware of the serious concern, first, that there might be an unduly extended time scale for change and, secondly, and more important, that the regional health authorities can adjust the figures as they see fit to make allowances for what they assess as deprivation? Bearing in mind the fact that regional health authorities are not subject to any democratic control, will my right hon. Friend see to it personally that they do not undermine his excellent plans?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am aware of the anxiety in Southend because my hon. Friend has made his concerns clear to us. There are two aspects of the matter. First, it is fair to say that the potential gains for Southend, which will come through in the end, must be set against the disruption to the losers in the process. It is fair to take a little longer so that the disruption is tolerable. Secondly, I can set my hon. Friend's mind at rest that all the formulae produced by the regions will have to come to my Department for approval and I shall ensure that they are fair.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Secretary of State aware that he should not be too tolerant with the regional health authorities? I endorse what was said a moment ago. If the Secretary of State does not insist on the authorities allocating resources on a weighted capitation basis, underprivileged areas such as north Staffordshire will not receive the money to which they are entitled. Will the Secretary of State press them strongly?

Mr. Waldegrave: I can give the right hon. Gentleman the same assurance as I gave earlier. The plans put forward by the regions will be carefully scrutinised in the Department to make sure that they are consistent and sensible.

Mr. Hayes: While warmly welcoming the minimum 10 per cent. cash increase, which should make it a great deal easier to introduce weighted capitation at district level, may I ask my right hon. Friend to take into account poor beleaguered Essex, which year after year has suffered cash shortages in the national health service? Will my right hon. Friend do what he can to support our new regional chairman, who is very able and supportive?

Mr. Waldegrave: I strongly endorse what my hon. Friend said about the regional chairman, who is strengthening management throughout his area. I take my hon. Friend's point. He understands why I have slowed down by, I hope, no more than a year the move to full weighted capitation at the regional level so that there is not too much disruption in the process.

Gulf War Casualties

3. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that the best medical facilities in this country are available when needed to treat Gulf war coalition casualties; and if he will make a statement.

10. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received with regard to the additional resourcing requirements of hospitals likely to be caring for possible casualties of the Gulf war.

Mr. Waldegrave: Health authorities have made arrangements to treat British Gulf casualties. The national health service will be able to recover the full costs of such treatment.

Mr. Strang: Has the Secretary of State heard the Prime Minister's warning that Saddam Hussein might soon resort to the use of chemical weapons? Does he agree with the views of medical experts that in the worst-case scenario, our burns and plastic surgery units might be overwhelmed with thousands of casualties? Is he satisfied that health authorities are taking all immediate steps to increase the number of staff available in such units, as it is likely that staff, rather than equipment and buildings, will limit the number of people who can be treated quickly?

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes, Sir. I am satisfied that the health service is well prepared. The remarks to which the hon. Gentleman may be referring were originally made by Professor McGrouther, a great man in plastic surgery. I am happy to say that last week he said that he was quite satisfied that the health service is fully prepared.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the Secretary of State give an assurance to the House that no patients will be turned away from hospitals before any Gulf casualties arrive in Britain? If it has to happen, will he ensure that national health service patients share the sacrifice equally with private patients in national health service beds?

Mr. Waldegrave: We do not believe that it will be necessary for patients to be turned away from hospitals or for wards to be emptied at present. It is worth remembering that if the worst comes to the worst and there are many casualties, there will be a considerable warning time before patients begin to arrive in national health service hospitals.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have checked with Northampton district health authority and in particular Northampton general hospital and that I have only the utmost praise for the preparations that have been undertaken? May I say a particular thank you to the Department of Health?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I join him in saying that the Gulf crisis shows the health service once again at its very best. The speedy co-operation that has been exercised between the different levels—region, centre, district and hospital—is exemplary.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will meet the full extra cost of Gulf casualties so that any increase in waiting lists does not last too long?

Mr. Waldegrave: I give my hon. Friend that assurance in the clearest terms.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While accepting the Secretary of State's assurance about the immediate care of casualties, may I ask about their long-term care? Will they be left to depend on local charities or will adequate provision be made for them in their communities?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The Ministry of Defence and the forces have considerable expertise in the matter. My hon. Friend the Minister for Health will be answering a question later today about the role of the social services in this.

Mr. Allason: Did my right hon. Friend see the televised broadcast on behalf of the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association during the weekend and does he agree that the point might be misinterpreted? Will he confirm that there is plenty of room for rehabilitation and recuperation for any Gulf casualties and that the private sector will not have to contribute places?

Mr. Waldegrave: As I said, the national health service and the organisations that are accountable to the House are well prepared for any challenge that may face them.

Mr. Robin Cook: In view of the Secretary of State's welcome assurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) that it should not be necessary for hospitals to turn away patients now, may I invite him to comment on a letter that I have seen that was sent to a woman in her 80s advising her that many operations have been cancelled at the hospital in question because beds are already closed for Gulf casualties? Does he agree that it would be wrong if elderly patients were to become early casualties of the Gulf war? Will he urge

health authorities to meet the new emergency not by closing even more beds but by bringing back into service some of the 27,000 that have been closed under Conservative rule?

Mr. Waldegrave: If the hon. Gentleman had been interested in receiving a serious reply to a serious question, he would have been courteous enough to raise the matter with me earlier. If he will send me the letter, I will give him a proper reply.

Mr. Sims: Although the treatment of Gulf casualties may mean the postponement of non-urgent operations, may we be assured that there will be no diminution in the ability of the NHS to respond to civil emergencies such as multiple car crashes or the recent Cannon street train crash?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend's point is entirely fair. I have been assured by the chief executive of the health service that it will be able to maintain its emergency cover for civil emergencies. It is worth remembering that compared with the scale of activities of the NHS, which treats about 8·5 million cases a year, even the worst-case scenarios about which the commentators have been telling us should be relatively well within its capacity.

Manchester Hospitals

4. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for a review of hospital services in the Manchester/Trafford area following the opting-out decision by central Manchester hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: None, Sir.

Mr. Lloyd: Is the Minister prepared to put on record in this place what his colleague in another place told me in a letter: that when the new children's hospital is built in central Manchester—on the same site as the now to be opted-out hospital—it will itself be considered for opting out? Is he aware that in the north-west region we already have about double the national child mortality rate and that in central Manchester we have triple the rate? Is the Minister aware that the people of the region do not want opting out, which is irrelevant to their needs, but the resources to make sure that our children do not die?

Mr. Dorrell: No hospital has opted out of the NHS and we shall not entertain a proposal from any NHS hospital to opt out of the NHS. NHS hospitals are not for sale. The change that we are introducing is designed to give more power to the local management teams of hospitals to use the resources devoted to those hospitals to the best advantage of the patients.

Mr. Knox: Will my hon. Friend explain why Christie hospital in Manchester has refused to supply the drug interleukin to my constituent Mrs. Kendrick, even though it had been prescribed by Dr. Thatcher of that hospital? Does this have anything to do with the reorganisation of hospitals in Manchester?

Mr. Dorrell: It has nothing to do with the reorganisation of hospitals. There has been some discussion of the subject in the press today and I make three simple points about it: interleukin does not have a product licence in this country or in the United States; one manufacturer of the drug has decided not to proceed with clinical trials because of doubts over its efficacy, and the decision not to use the drug in Christie hospital was taken by the drug and therapeutics committee of that hospital before Christmas, nine of the 12 members of that committee being medical people.

Mr. Robin Cook: In view of the Minister's reference to the minute of the 12 consultants, may I remind him that it clearly specified that the consultants decided that there was general support for interleukin, but that the treatment could not be used within existing funds? Is not it clear from the very committee from which he quotes that its decision not to proceed with a drug that had been used in that hospital for four years, regardless of whether it had a licence, was due to the deficit at Christie hospital? Three years ago, even this Government met hospital deficits with extra funds, not extra cuts. Does not the Minister appreciate that the response to the case shows that the public would much rather that the Christie hospital deficit was cleared by the taxpayer than by not treating Mrs. Kendrick?

Mr. Dorrell: Is the hon. Gentleman inviting the House to put his clinical opinion ahead of that of the Committee on Safety of Medicines or the Food and Drug Administration? The use of that drug in Christie hospital was part of a clinical trial and the hospital's drug and therapeutics committee decided that there were greater priorities for the use of the resources available to the hospital. The Labour party is as explicit as the Government in proposing that the only way to run a publicly funded free national health service is on the basis of there being a limit to the resources available to fund it.

Heart Attacks

5. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the rate of heart attacks in *(a)* men and *(b)* women (i) under 50 and (ii) over 50 years.

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): In 1989, the death rate per 10,000 population in England from acute myocardial infarction was 1·03 for men and 0·13 for women under the age of 50 and 68·81 for men and 45·88 for women over the age of 50.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. She is saying that young women hardly ever have heart attacks or strokes, whereas the number of women over 50 who suffer those conditions is rapidly catching up with the number of men. They are the largest single cause of death for women in that older age group. Is my hon. Friend aware of the research work carried out at King's College hospital showing that hormone replacement therapy is a way to protect women from such an early death? Will she state the amount of money currently spent in the health service on making hormone replacement therapy available to women in that older age group?

Mrs. Bottomley: It would be difficult to be in this place with my hon. Friend without having a passing acquaintance with the subject of hormone replacement therapy and the work undertaken at King's College hospital. She has identified the important contribution that the treatment can make. We spend £29·5 million in the health service on hormone replacement therapy and the number of prescriptions has tripled over the past 10 years. Although there is evidence of the contribution of HRT in

preventing cardiovascular disease, it is not conclusive. My hon. Friend must bear with us while further research is undertaken to assess the effects of HRT on those with osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease.

Mr. Rooker: Will the Minister comment on the stark contrast highlighted by the Public Accounts Committee's report on coronary heart disease? In this country we spend £10 million on prevention and £500 million on the treatment of the biggest killer, which kills 3,000 people a week. That stark contrast in expenditure shows that the Government need to respond to the need for prevention.

Since the Public Accounts Committee reported, what has the Department of Health done about monitoring the training of ambulance crews so that they can deal with the matter? The Minister must know that half the people who die from heart disease die in the first two hours. When the Department of Health gave evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, the Department was not monitoring the extra training being given to ambulance crews in that vital sector.

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's recognition that prevention is better than cure. I hope that he will join us in carrying forward our strategies and priorities for health. Certainly, the prevention of heart disease—whether through the GPs' contract, the "Look after your Heart" campaign or environmental and lifestyle factors, especially smoking—is crucial. The hon. Gentleman will know that treatment is also costly. The number of heart transplants has risen from three to 295 in 10 years and the number of coronary artery bypass grafts has risen from 3,100 to almost 13,000.

As for the training of ambulance crews, a great deal of work is being done to ensure that they are properly qualified and that defibrillators are available in ambulances.

General Practitioners

6. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners have opted to become budget holders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that there are currently around 300 practices undertaking the preparatory work necessary to become fundholders from 1 April.

Mr. Hind: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the essence of the internal market in the NHS is choice and that if it is to succeed, more general practitioners must be encouraged to take up budget holding and more hospitals, such as Wrightington on the edge of my constituency, must be encouraged to become national health trusts?

Mr. Waldegrave: The benefits of both systems are becoming increasingly understood. Both systems are voluntary, but tremendous benefits are available to patients from the GP fund-holding scheme—a matter which I hope that Opposition Members will consider in due course, because it would be paradoxical if that aspect, which is aimed at giving help to patients and those most directly representative of them, should run into opposition from the Labour party.

Mr. Bradley: Is the Secretary of State aware that the denial of interleukin-2 to a patient at Christie hospital shows the problem of fixed budgets? In a written answer to me the Department of Health said that that drug could be used on a named patient. The drug and therapeutics committee said that the drug was not being prescribed not because it did not agree with it in principle but because "this could not be achieved within existing funding." That drug has not been allowed to Mrs. Kendrick and 50 others because the budget is overspent. Will the Secretary of State please review the position and ensure that life-saving drugs are available to all patients if they are about to die?

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an important matter, but the question was too long.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has dealt with the matter once. I repeat that the truth of the matter is that the drug and therapeutics committee of that hospital took an entirely sensible view that against the background of doubts about the drug—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman will find that at the time the meeting took place the committee believed that the drug had a product licence whereas in fact it did not. Other, more expensive drugs are still being prescribed in the hospital.

One doctor breaking ranks with his colleagues like that and taking an individual case is exactly the wrong way to make decisions about such matters and puts patients in a difficult position. We must stand on the clinical decisions of the committees in the hospitals. They have always had difficult decisions to make about alternative treatments. I am sure that the doctors in that hospital took the right decision, which was not to spend a large sum of money on a drug of doubtful efficacy.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Select Committee on Health will be carefully monitoring the effects of the NHS reforms. If he and his colleagues wish to remain closely in touch with what is happening at the grass roots, will he accept an invitation from Cumberland house, the largest general practice in my constituency, which has opted for budget-holding status, to discuss what it sees as the advantages and some of the expected problems of budget holding?

Mr. Waldegrave: I visited my hon. Friend's constituency not very long ago, and very pleasant it was, too. I will try to fit another into my programme. I also visited two proposed budget-holding practices in East Anglia and south London, and I was very impressed by the enthusiasm shown at both. They will rapidly offer patients significant benefits.

Nurse Prescribing

7. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to introduce a system of limited drug prescribing for qualified nurses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We support the principle of nurse prescribing. The advisory group report on nurse prescribing and comments received during the consultation period identified a number of issues that require further work, which we are urgently carrying forward.

Mr. Kirkwood: Although the Government's support for limited nurse prescribing is welcome, does the Minister

acknowledge the suspicion that the Government are using delaying tactics by establishing independent cost benefit analysis of some of the problems that the consultation process reveals? When will we know the terms of reference of that analysis, and may we have an assurance that if it suggests that additional costs will be incurred because people who do not currently receive prescriptions will do so in future, that will not be a deciding factor in vetoing the scheme's introduction?

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope to disabuse the hon. Gentleman of such suspicions. The cost benefit analysis is important, and we hope to announce the details shortly. We will certainly make all the information available. However, there are other issues to be considered—such as deciding the precise formula, training, and the relationship between nurse and general practitioner prescribing. It is a complex matter, but the concept has strong support and we shall carry forward that work.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that many practice nurses would welcome a limited prescribing arrangement? With proper training and a sensible list of drugs, it should be possible for nurses to relieve their practitioners of regular prescribing, thus releasing them for other work. When that bright initiative is in place, will the nurses be encouraged to prescribe generically, as is done in hospitals?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend makes a strong case for nurse prescribing, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), when he introduced his ten-minute Bill last week. Such an arrangement would help not only practice nurses but health visitors and district nurses. Many argue that they, too, could helpfully prescribe a limited range of items. With the greater emphasis being placed on community care, those other categories could certainly play a fuller part. I give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. We are carrying forward that work and we want to see nurses play their part in prescribing.

NHS Management Board

8. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he proposes to make changes to the powers of the NHS management board.

Mr. Waldegrave: The NHS management board has not existed since 1989. I have no plans to make changes to the powers of the management executive that replaced it.

Mr. Cousins: Will the Secretary of State ensure that before all the management board members dwindle away to take up high-paid jobs in self-governing hospitals, they do something about the plight of low-paid NHS workers? I refer particularly to blood transfusion workers in the northern region, who have waited two and a half years for a pay regrading under the guidelines issues by the management board. Everyone is praising those workers, rightly, at this time—but will the Secretary of State ensure that they get properly paid as well?

Mr. Waldegrave: The management board has already dwindled away, because it no longer exists. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point and he is right to say that there are too many low-paid people in the health service. In the negotiations on ancillary pay, we should try to shift attention towards the lowest-paid.

Project 2000

9. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current funding of Project 2000.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In this financial year, we have provided £30 million from central funding for the implementation of Project 2000. Next year, £71 million will be available.

Mr. Porter: Although the Royal College of Nursing has expressed concern that the speed of funding does not match the desire to implement Project 2000 as soon as possible, will my hon. Friend confirm that when it is in place throughout the country, its training provisions will make nursing a most attractive profession for the future?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. The East Suffolk, Great Yarmouth and Waveney nursing school in my hon. Friend's constituency was among those that received approval in the first wave. By the end of next year, half the nurses training will be in Project 2000 courses, by which time we shall have spent £109 million. That is a rapid rate of progress and, while I understand the desire to implement the scheme even faster, we are content with the speed at which Project 2000 courses—which lay the foundation for the professional nurses of the future—are introduced.

Dr. Kim Howells: Is the Minister aware that, laudable though the aims of Project 2000 are, some area health authorities are strapped for cash and are finding it difficult to identify proper campus sites for training nurses? Mid Glamorgan is a classic example. It is being forced to consider closing down the excellent rehabilitation centre at Talygarn to house nurses.

Mrs. Bottomley: My right hon. Friend recently announced our plans to carry forward the work on the Peat Marwick McLintock report on nurse education and its management, and also the work of working paper No. 10. We understand that there needs to be proper organisation of nurse training within the regions. I cannot comment on the hon. Gentleman's area, but can say only that, within the English health authorities, good headway has been made in introducing Project 2000 and we are certainly considering nurse education in a broader context as we look to the future.

Hospices

11. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds the Government have allocated to the voluntary hospice movement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 9 January I announced the allocation of an additional £16·96 million to health authorities in England for 1991-92 to enable authorities to increase the support that they give to hospice organisations. Last year that figure was £8 million.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that her figures confirm the Government's support for the increasing role that the voluntary hospice movement is playing, alongside the national health service? Will she continue to monitor

the costs of that movement, not least when it has to face unexpected costs such as national pay awards, and also when it loses money as a result of decisions taken by local Department of Social Security offices not to recognise voluntary contributions by patients to the running of those hospices?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend speaks with authority about hospices, as the Trinity hospice provides a service for many of his constituents. Questions of income support are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security—it is not the case that the higher rate is paid for those for whom no charge is made. I understand that his hospice received in the order of £443,000 last year from the health authority and from money made available by central Government. That was a 25 per cent. increase on the help that it received the year before.

Mr. Spearing: Can the Minister confirm that this welcome increase in grants to the hospice movement is partly based on the fact that it covers a wide spectrum of the public potential, and partly because it provides a unique service between hospice and home? Will she also confirm that, due to effects of the hospice upon the statutory service, any additional expenditure saves money elsewhere?

Mrs. Bottomley: I have no doubt that any additional money is providing good value by ensuring a quality service. All of us would want to pay tribute to the voluntary hospice movement and the work that it has undertaken in pioneering a quality service for the dying. The hon. Gentleman is right to identify not only those in hospice beds, but the excellent work achieved by hospices at home. With the rapid expansion in the voluntary hospice movement, it is important to integrate planning, consideration and provision between the voluntary hospice movement and national health service provision. We are proceeding with work to ensure that the two develop in tandem and in a spirit of co-operation.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the voluntary hospice movement is most welcome in all parts of every constituency and that this further help from the Government will be welcomed by the movement?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend for endorsing the warm tribute that all of us would want to pay to the hospice movement. The number of hospice beds has doubled in the past 10 years. As well as providing additional funding this year, we have decided to establish a research project into standards of palliative care and have also asked the Standing Medical Advisory Committee and Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee to report back on the organisation of hospice care.

Hospital Beds, Sheffield

12. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Trent regional health authority to discuss the hospital bed situation in the Sheffield health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: When I next meet Sir Michael Carlisle I shall congratulate him on the fact that the number of in-patients treated by Sheffield health authority has increased by 52 per cent. since 1979. I shall also congratulate him on the fact that in-patient waiting lists in Sheffield have fallen by nearly 14 per cent. in the last 12 months, while the number of people waiting for more than 12 months is down by 56 per cent. over the same period.

Mr. Duffy: Nevertheless, 286 hospital beds have been for financial reasons lost in Sheffield over the past year. Red alerts continue, inevitably throwing a greater strain on surgical beds and waiting lists, out-patient facilities and the staff who must work the beds a good deal more intensively as a result. Does the Minister believe that the factual statment is a matter for congratulation?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman's difficulty is that he is pushed back on press releases and on repeating already well-repeated formulae. What seems more important to me is the fact that Sheffield health authority has shorter waiting lists and is treating more patients than ever before.

Gulf War Casualties

13. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to social services departments relating to the care of service men injured or disabled in the Gulf conflict; and if he will publish it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has today written to social services departments setting out the arrangments made by the Ministry of Defence and the national health service for treating Gulf casualties. I have placed a copy in the Library.

Mr. Rowe: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does she realise that, in the event of a land war, there will probably be a number of seriously disabled casualties and that, when the national health service has done all that it can to stabilise their condition, some will require accommodatiton suitable for people in wheelchairs? Can my hon. Friend assure me that she will consult her colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and the Department of the Environment to ensure that sufficient accommodation of that kind is provided—even if it is only temporary—so that the houses in which those unfortunate people must bring up their families can be assessed with a view to adaptation?

Mrs. Bottomley: As my hon. Friend will know, the Ministry of Defence has well-organised arrangements for the welfare and support of casualties and their families, but, as he pointed out, it is difficult to make predictions. It will be important for local authorities to keep in close touch with the MOD and, if necessary, the Department of the Environment. We shall certainly play our part in that.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister aware that social services departments in London are currently under great pressure? They will all wish to provide the maximum resources and support for any Gulf casualties, but will the Minister make it clear to them that the Government will provide all the necessary resources?

Mrs. Bottomley: I remind the hon. Gentleman that social services departments throughout the country have been given the largest increase in their standard spending assessments for 15 years—an increase of 23·5 per cent. We anticipate that local authorities will be able to respond to circumstances as they normally do in civil emergencies, and will play their part. As the letter makes clear, in the

first place they will need to work closely with the Ministry of Defence, and use their existing arrangements for supporting casualties and their families.

Heart Disease

14. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new initiatives he is considering to combat coronary heart disease.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Combating coronary heart disease is one of our biggest challenges. That was why we launched the joint Department of Health/Health Education Authority "Look After Your Heart" programme in 1987. A new five-year strategy was recently launched.

Mr. Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that the number of people who die daily in this country of premature coronary heart disease is equivalent to the number of passengers on a fully loaded jumbo jet? Does she realise that the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom are among the six countries with the world's worst record of coronary heart disease? How does she react to the report of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee on cholesterol testing, and, in particular, to the idea of giving general practitioners information about how to deal with patients with above-average cholesterol levels in their blood?

Mrs. Bottomley: As my hon. Friend rightly says, there are about 160,000 deaths each year and about 35 million working days are lost each year through coronary heart disease. Although our record for coronary heart disease was extremely severe, I can assure my hon. Friend that we have already beaten the World Health Organisation's health-for-all target of 15 per cent; we have seen a reduction of 24 per cent. in our coronary heart disease rates. We want to do very much better. The report by the Standing Medical Advisory Committee on cholesterol testing is still being considered, but most certainly general practitioners, like the Health Education Authority and the health service generally, have a full part to play in combating this cause of early death.

Mr. Galbraith: Does the Minister agree that one of the most significant contributions that we can make to the reduction of coronary heart disease is to reduce the incidence of smoking in the population? What steps are the Government taking, therefore, to curtail the advertising of smoking and why are they seeking to gut the Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), which would certainly significantly reduce smoking among children and the younger age group?

Mrs. Bottomley: I endorse the point made by the hon. Gentleman; something like 20 per cent. of the deaths are associated with smoking. We spend around £3 million campaigning to reduce smoking. It is deplorable that those under 16 should be sold cigarettes. I very much hope that we can take further steps to prevent this. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is today consulting on the tobacco labelling directive, further wording and the attention that can be drawn to the fact that smoking damages health.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Prime Minister aware that, as the recession bites even deeper in all parts of the country, not least in the west midlands, the country will simply not buy the nonsense that it is all due to the Gulf war? Is he aware, further, that people recognise that the recession and the devastation that are occurring in so many parts of the country are due to the disastrous policies of a discredited Government who simply do not know from day to day where they are going?

The Prime Minister: I certainly accept that there is a downturn in the economy and I have made that clear. But the hon. Gentleman must recognise that that downturn, in terms of investment and growth, comes from a very high level after a very lengthy period of growth. It is absolutely essential that we take the appropriate decisions now to ensure that we have a lower rate of inflation in the economy in the 1990s.

Mr. Hayes: Is not my right hon. Friend greatly encouraged by the fact that British investment outstrips that in Germany, France and Italy? Does not he think that British industry is getting rather fed up with the Labour party continually saying that there is no end to the recession in sight and no economic good news? Does he agree that it is becoming the party of the abominable no-men?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, our investment record over recent years has been extremely good—a record unmatched elsewhere in the Community.

Mr. Kinnock: Since it is clear that before too many weeks have passed the Government will be forced to cut interest rates, why do they not do it now and save British industries and British home buyers absolutely pointless pain?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should not be so desperate. If he panics in opposition, what might he do in government?

Mr. Kinnock: First, all observable panic is on the right hon. Gentleman's side of the House. Secondly, he will soon have a very good opportunity of finding out the strength of Labour in government.

It is all very well for the Prime Minister to try to avoid the question. It is not his business which he spent a lifetime building up that is now threatened; it is not his factory that is facing closure; and it is not his mortgage that threatens to put him and his family out of their home. Is he not ashamed that Britain, alone of all the major industrial countries, is facing, under his Government, prolonged slump—extended slump—because of his policies?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has clearly overlooked the fact that—*[Interruption.]*—I shall come directly to the question. The right hon. Gentleman

has clearly overlooked the fact that there is a recession in a number of countries. The right hon. Gentleman misunderstands the importance of interest rates. Nobody wants interest rates to be unduly high, but we need to ensure that we have a low inflation economy. That is the means to ensure that we have it.

Mrs. Peacock: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of the many Gulf support groups that have been set up throughout the country to offer help and support to those families who have loved ones fighting in the Gulf. Will he join me today in sending best wishes to the two groups in my constituency, in Batley and Cleckheaton, who are doing a superb job?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly happy to do as my hon. Friend requests. I am delighted by the number of Gulf support groups that have been set up around the country and I wish them all well.

Q2. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: Can the Prime Minister tell us how this war can have any moral or democratic purpose when British troops risk being slaughtered on the desert sands while the Kuwaiti royal family is gallivanting around the gambling dens and casinos, living it up? When the war is over and those Kuwaiti American stooges are back in power, with all their luxury, some British troops will be coming back to the dole queue, the poll tax and cardboard city. Is that the classless society that the Prime Minister talks about?

The Prime Minister: I always thought that the hon. Gentleman was against the sort of actions that we have seen in Kuwait by the Iraqis. I am sorry that I am wrong.

Q3. **Dame Peggy Fenner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dame Peggy Fenner: During my right hon. Friend's busy day I am sure that he will share my concern about the current proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy. Does he agree with me that we should not accept any reform that penalises the efficient British farmer, since that will not help the British consumer?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I share the view of the majority of hon. Members that further reform of the common agricultural policy is needed, but that must make European agriculture more, not less, open to market forces. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been making clear in Brussels, we shall very strongly resist any proposals that penalise the efficient farmer and, in so doing, place the burden upon consumers.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister recall the very welcome words of the Foreign Secretary at the weekend when he said that when the fighting is over we must be prepared to use the peace wisely? May I therefore put to him this proposition: if the United Nations provides the authority for fighting the war in the Gulf, the United Nations should have the responsibility for building the peace that follows it. Does the Prime Minister agree?

The Prime Minister: We shall certainly be discussing, both within the United Nations and beyond—with the Arab states that have the primary interest—what is necessary for the future security of the region.

Q4. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nicholls: Has my right hon. Friend noted that for the last four months inflation has been running at about 1·9 per cent. per annum? Does not that show that the Government's policy of reducing inflation is working? Does not such a policy offer a far more certain way towards eventual interest rate reductions than the soft option advocated by the Leader of the Opposition by way of a devaluation?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Soft options tend to lead to hard times. Our policies are succeeding in reducing inflation. As inflation comes down there will be the opportunity for sustained interest rate reductions.

Ms. Ruddock: Does the Prime Minister agree with me——

Mr. Dickens: I saw the hon. Lady on television.

Mr. Speaker: So did I.

Ms. Ruddock: Does the Prime Minister agree with me that, in keeping with the spirit and purposes of the United Nations, consent to the allied military action is limited to ending Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, that peace and security in the region can be achieved by other means, and that those means must include the removal of nuclear and chemical weapons throughout the region?

The Prime Minister: The present aims are set out perfectly clearly in Security Council resolutions. As to the second point in the hon. Lady's question, I think that it is a matter that everyone will wish to address after the conclusion of the conflict.

Q5. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wilshire: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever our party politics, we should all welcome the proposed abolition of the apartheid laws in South Africa? Does he agree also that, whatever we may think about that country's past, the best way to support its Government now is to help them make those changes as quickly as possible and to begin the process of reintegrating South Africa into the community of nations?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is necessary to support the South African Government. But perhaps even more relevant is support for the people of South Africa—all of them. President de Klerk has made a truly massive move forward and it is now for the international community to respond. I hope very much

that it will do so. I have already discussed the matter with the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and with President Bush, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised it with European Community Foreign Ministers yesterday. I spoke about it this morning with Mr. Hawke, the Australian Prime Minister. He and I agree very strongly that the time has come to begin lifting the Commonwealth measures, especially the sports sanctions, particularly in the case of those sports that are integrated in South Africa. All in all, the announcement by President de Klerk was a most welcome move forward.

Q6. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hogg: Is the Prime Minister aware that the naval base at Rosyth in Scotland employs 5,000 naval and civilian personnel? Is he aware that we have received ministerial assurances that, in the defence review, all the options will be considered impartially? Is he aware of a secret study report showing that there is an intention to close Rosyth in the shortest possible time? Does not he agree that it is disgraceful that at a time when our naval personnel are serving in the Gulf, their home base is being threatened in this way?

The Prime Minister: No decision has been made to close Rosyth or any other naval base. We fully recognise the implications that closure would have for employment in the area. Those implications would be fully considered and examined before any such decision was taken.

Mr. Haselhurst: Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that if President Bush raises the question of transatlantic air routes he—the Prime Minister—will sustain the Government's position, as outlined by the Secretary of State for Transport, in a very strong and sensible defence of British civil aviation?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is discussing these matters. I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend will defend our interests very robustly.

Mr. Eadie: How does the Prime Minister justify the salary of £225,000 per annum being paid to the new chairman of British Coal? Previous chairmen had a large industry and a comparatively small salary, whereas the present chairman is inheriting a very small industry and will have a large salary. Some of us suspect that his terms of reference are to make the industry smaller still.

The Prime Minister: The gentleman concerned is being paid according to his ability.

Q7. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Moate: Reverting to reform of the common agricultural policy, does my right hon. Friend agree that if, for social reasons, the Germans and French wish to subsidise their small farmers, they should be free to do so? As the British taxpayer will next year spend £4 billion on agricultural subsidies, apparently to produce inadequate incomes for farmers and excessively high prices for consumers, is not it time we considered repatriating agricultural policy so that we can decide what is best for Britain?

The Prime Minister: The common agricultural policy is an established element of the European Community. I share my hon. Friend's view that it is an unsatisfactory one, and for that reason we are seeking to reform it.

Mr. Alan Williams: Is the Prime Minister aware that a measure of the underlying weakness of our economy is the fact that, excluding North sea oil, in the past three and a half years, at constant prices, we have had a trade deficit of £85 billion? Why does he believe that we can solve that problem with the same rate of exchange that caused it?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is selective in his criticism. He wholly forgets that we had eight successive years of growth, a period in which our investment has grown faster than that of Germany, Italy, France and anyone else in the European Community and we now have a wholly different industrial position from that which we inherited in 1979.

Q8. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Irvine: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the concern of many firms operating in the financial services sector about the European Commission's draft directive on capital adequacy? Does he agree that some of the requirements imposed on capital adequacy are excessive, and will he make vigorous representations to ensure that, where appropriate, they are reduced?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend raises. He will know that firms that act purely as advisers are exempt from the requirements of the capital adequacy directive. We do not wish to see inappropriate or unnecessary capital requirements imposed on any United Kingdom investment firm.

Q9. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barron: Under the private Bill procedure, the Government have always accepted their neutrality to be one of support for a private Bill. Last Thursday night, the Southampton Rapid Transit Bill was defeated by the use of the payroll vote, including 10 members of the Cabinet, two of whom are members of the War Cabinet, which was suspended when that vote took place. What has changed the Government's mind? Was it political judgment or political spite?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should know that that was the individual decision of Members of this House.

United States Forces (United Kingdom)

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement on the position of United States nuclear capable forces in the United Kingdom.

The United States Government have been considering their arrangements for the forward support of their nuclear missile submarines and for the basing of their dual capable aircraft in the United Kingdom. These are being affected in the case of the submarines by the withdrawal of the Poseidon missile submarines, which removes the need for forward support in the north-eastern Atlantic area.

In respect of the dual capable aircraft, the implications of the changed situation of the Warsaw pact are particularly relevant. The United States Defence Secretary, Mr. Cheney, advised me of their proposals, which have since been discussed between us, and I can now advise the House of the outcome, which is being simultaneously made public in the United States.

First, as a result of a decision to accelerate the withdrawal from service of the United States Poseidon missile submarines, the United States Navy will, by the end of this year, no longer have a requirement for its submarine support facility at Holy Loch and this facility will therefore close. The exact date of closure has yet to be determined, but is likely to be some time in 1992.

Secondly, United States F111E and EF111 aircraft at present based at RAF Upper Heyford and F111F aircraft currently based at RAF Lakenheath will be withdrawn to the United States. The F111Fs will deploy to Upper Heyford for possibly some six weeks each year for exercises and training. These aircraft will remain committed to NATO and would return to basing in the United Kingdom in crisis or war. As envisaged for some time under NATO plans for the restructuring of alliance nuclear forces, United States F15E aircraft will be deployed to the United Kingdom, beginning in 1992; and it has now been decided that they are to be based at RAF Lakenheath. They will be deployed in smaller numbers than the F111 wing currently based there. These changes will be completed in 1994. The net effect will be fewer, but more modern dual capable aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Changes in the types of equipment needed to sustain our defences and to reflect the new international security situation have led to these different needs. The Government understand the reasons for these decisions, but, none the less, they will have significant local economic consequences.

The constituencies of a number of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members will be affected. In particular, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is giving particular attention to the implications of the closure of the Holy Loch facility.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement. The withdrawal of Poseidon missile submarines was expected and is welcome. Can he confirm that the closure of the facility is earlier than anticipated? Is there any possibility of its being used in future for the docking of United States hunter-killer submarines with dual capable cruise missiles?

The House notes that the Secretary of State for Scotland will give attention to the economic consequences of the closure. Can the Secretary of State for Defence ensure that public funds, both British and American, will be available for the regeneration of the Dunoon area? Can he say whether the more limited use of Upper Heyford is in response to local concern about aircraft noise? Can he tell the House whether the United States F15E will be fitted with SRAM(T) missiles and, if so, which other European nations in NATO will be offering similar facilities?

Mr. King: I can confirm that the closure is a little earlier than was originally envisaged. It is possible that there will be periodic visits but not the forward support position of United States naval tenders and possibly hunter-killer submarines.

The hon. Gentleman asked about assistance for the area. The United States, which has a number of direct employees at Holy Loch and the other bases, is advising them at the moment about redundancies and about its efforts to assist them to find alternative employment. As I have already advised the House, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is considering the implications of the closure for Dunoon.

As to the weaponry that might be carried by the aircraft, there is no change from the present weaponry. There is no decision yet as to whether the United States will proceed with what is known as SRAM(T) or TASM. That is a matter for the future.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his announcement constitutes a reorientation of American efforts in Europe, but that it in no way decouples their commitment to Europe and to the United Kingdom?

Mr. King: I confirm that. The proposal to station the F15Es at Lakenheath confirms the Americans' continuing intention to maintain a capability in Europe. We welcome that continuing commitment—albeit at lower levels, which reflect the new security situation—to NATO and to stationing forces in Europe.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I welcome the fact that the change reflects the new security arrangements. However, does the Secretary of State realise that it will have a significant impact on the economy of the Holy Loch and of the Cowal peninsula? Over the years, the Navy and the local people have built up good relations. I pay tribute to United states personnel for maintaining those relations, which is demonstrated by the fact that every year approximately 200 United States naval personnel marry local girls. That shows that many of them consider the area to be home.

The Cowal peninsula has been designated a fragile area by the Highlands and Islands development board. Many people in the hotel and bed-and-breakfast business—to say nothing of the 119 taxis that ply their trade in Dunoon —will be put out of work. Will the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Scotland give a commitment that they will come forward with financial assistance for the area, as they did at Dounreay? What is the future of Machrihanish airport?

Mr. King: I would want notice of the hon. Lady's final question. I am grateful for the responsible and sincere way in which she responded to what I recognise, in the

economic sense, must be disappointing news for her constituency and for those constituencies adjacent to it. I always try to be helpful, but I am not sure what I can do about the marriage prospects of so many girls in the Dunoon area. I take the point.

I pay tribute—and I know that the United States Government and the United States navy would also like to pay tribute—to the warm and friendly relations with the local people. The alliance has stood the world, NATO and Europe in such good stead. Personal relations locally play a big part in ensuring that the United States navy feels welcome. The navy will feel disappointed that it is leaving for other reasons. I take note of the hon. Lady's economic point.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I share the concern of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) about the effect of the closure at Holy Loch on the whole of the Clyde estuary. Do not the events in the Gulf and in eastern Europe, and the changes in this country, highlight the necessity for putting "Options for Change" on hold until the position is clarified, perhaps in a year's time, when we may look forward to greater civility and to easier decisions on Scottish defence facilities?

Mr. King: I know that my hon. Friend would not wish us to fossilise everything at this stage while we learn all possible lessons from the Gulf. There may be changes, economies and improvements that we can make which have nothing to do with the Gulf but which would be a sensible rationalisation. Part of the developments in "Options for Change" was an increased recognition of the importance of the reserves and of volunteer forces. My hon. Friend gives outstanding leadership to the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, so he will know of its splendid contribution in the Gulf.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Further to the comments of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), the economic implications of the reorientation of defence will have an adverse affect in our area. The area is poorly off at present, as the Secretary of State realises, and the Ministry of Defence has a responsibility there. For example, in my constituency 16 per cent. of the land is owned by the Ministry of Defence. Will the Secretary of State urge the Secretary of State for Scotland to meet the Members of Parliament who are involved so that we can examine the economic implications of the decisions?

Mr. King: I note the hon. Gentleman's comments and his perhaps tensions over the announcement, because he has genuinely not supported a nuclear presence in the area, yet we all recognise the economic benefits that it has brought and the problems that the announcement will pose for many of his constituents.

The heads on my left are nodding vigorously. I take it from that that the request for a meeting has been granted.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Will the new deployment of the United States air force in this country affect the Americans' requirement for standby bases and, in particular, the future of Greenham Common in my constituency?

Mr. King: I have no comment to make on Greenham Common. As my hon. Friend knows, progress in the withdrawal of cruise missiles is continuing very satisfactorily. By May the last cruise missile will have left. The proposal is that Upper Heyford should go on to a standby basis. One has certainly seen the advantage of that in the totally separate and different arrangements that can come from having facilities that can be available in time of need over RAF Lakenheath.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The "show us the flag" commitment to NATO apart, which I understand, what is the military role of the F15E aircraft?

Mr. King: It is a dual capable aircraft which can carry either conventional or nuclear bombs.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who, for years, have supported our nuclear deterrent capability and have welcomed United States service men and their role in that military activity will be saddened that technical change has meant that they will leave the Holy Loch? We have always recognised that military bases in Scotland were substantial employers and were good for the local economy. We want no crocodile tears from Opposition Members who, for years, have campaigned for the closure of the bases.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting clearly in the voice of Scotland the dilemma that many Opposition Members face. Some of them have faced it quite genuinely, but others less so.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Secretary of State clarify his answer to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on the possible future use of Holy Loch, perhaps as a base for SSNs with cruise missiles? Does that exclude the possibility of its being used for United States Trident-type submarines in future? In terms of future possibilities for employment in Scotland, may we take it that the meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland is a clear departure from asking market forces to solve such problems? May we expect similar initiatives in relation to Rosyth?

Mr. King: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's second question is no, but, within the sensible economic approach, my right hon. Friend will be anxious to see what can be done to help in the difficult circumstances. However, on the hon. Gentleman's first point, I am not ruling anything out, but I know of no proposals for a further base in the Holy Loch. I said that it might be used for periodic visits, but not as a base.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that many people will regard this as a disappointingly premature decision? Nevertheless, does he agree that the deployment of Polaris played a triumphant part in keeping the peace since 1945?

Mr. King: The nuclear deterrent has ensured the longest period of peace in Europe this century. It is in no way an abandonment of the deterrent. It is a recognition that the introduction of the Trident submarine means that the United States is able to deploy its deterrent without the need for a forward-operating base in the north-eastern Atlantic.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the majority of people in Scotland will be happy about the decision by the American Administration as it marks the end of a 30-year campaign to get rid of the Polaris submarine base? Thirty years ago, my wife and I and my young family took part in the many

[Mr. David Lambie]

demonstrations at Dunoon, on the Holy Loch, protesting against the decision to set up the Polaris base, which was supported by Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister of a Conservative Government. Now that we have got rid of one American base in Scotland, when shall we get rid of the rest?

Mr. King: Many people, not only on this side of the House, may reflect that the continuing ability of the hon. Gentleman and his family to demonstrate in peace on such matters owes not a small amount to the continuing deterrence of NATO, which has held the peace in Europe all this time. The changes that I have announced today are not a departure from that policy. They mean that technical change and modernisation will enable the nuclear deterrent that has helped to keep the peace in Europe to help sustain that peace in future.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): As this decision comes hard on the heels of the INF agreement and at a time of great international instability when there is hard evidence of circumvention of arms control agreements by the Soviets, will my right hon. Friend look long and hard at least at the European component of our alliance deterrent? The decision will mean a further reduction in the alliance's intermediate range nuclear capacity and we should look at least to an effective stand-off nuclear weapon for the Tornado.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend will recall that at the London summit the NATO leaders agreed that the alliance must maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe and kept up to date where necessary. My announcement today is precisely an implementation of that. I know that my hon. Friend would be the first to agree that modernisation of the deterrent—the submarine and aircraft deployments reflect that clearly—is an important way of ensuring that we maintain the strength of Europe and the NATO defence of Europe.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Is the Secretary of State aware that his announcement today raises enchanting spectres from our youth of our first visits to the Holy Loch when we were arrested on the pier and then acquitted because we had bought tickets? Does he agree that to fit the F15s, which are to be based in the United Kingdom, with TASMs would be a major change in the NATO capability facing the Soviet Union? Will he undertake to ensure that if they are so equipped a statement will be made to the House?

Mr. King: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman raises that. I thought that there was general support across the House for the NATO policy of keeping up to date an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman departs from that, but I believe that it is a sane and sensible policy in the present uncertain state of the world.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): While my right hon. Friend's statement is warmly welcomed on this side of the House and, for that matter, on the other side of the House, may I ask him whether he is aware that there is growing anxiety, particularly among Conservative Members and in the United States, about the difficulties which the United States has experienced in implementing CFE and, indeed, the continuing START nuclear talks? Is he further aware that there is strong evidence of circumvention in the Soviet Union and that there are increasing difficulties with verification? Can he reassure the House that the steps that he has announced have been taken in full knowledge of that deterioration of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union?

Mr. King: I take seriously the point made by my hon. Friend. We are worried about some of the evidence and the need for effective verification. The changes that I have announced will take place over a period. In the case of the submarines, there is an enhancement of capability; there is no reduction of capability. The much greater range of the Trident submarine simply makes unnecessary the use of a forward operating base. The situation in relation to the aircraft applies progressively until 1994 and obviously the United States will want to keep carefully under review its commitment to NATO against the background of the developing situation. But modernisation is important, and that issue is dealt with in the statement.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that his statement today may be only the first of many similar announcements to be made in the future under the twin influences of a reduction in east-west tension and technological advance in the sphere of defence procurement? Do not defence decisions of this kind underline the need to maintain and strengthen the political links between Europe and the United States?

Mr. King: People who unwisely thought that somehow NATO could be wound up and that there was no longer any need for United States-stationed forces in Europe have quieter voices now, bearing in mind the importance—including against the worrying background in the Soviet Union—of ensuring that we do not abandon the effective defence of NATO in a premature sense in what could be difficult circumstances. Therefore, I very much agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although it is understandable that the American taxpayer should seek to carry less of NATO's burden and to achieve sensible savings through the modernisation of equipment, the Soviet Union continues to sustain, and in some cases even enlarge, overwhelming superiority in most categories of nuclear weapons and in a number of categories of conventional weapons, including submarines and most types of aircraft?

Mr. King: That is true and it draws out clearly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) concerning worry about verification and about what still remains a very substantial military capability.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): As one who stood on Dunoon pier 30 years ago, may I ask the Secretary of State to accept my unqualified welcome for his announcement today? Will he look forward with me to the Holy Loch being returned to a purpose more consistent with its name? Does he recognise that during those 30 years the economy of the Holy Loch area has been completely skewered by the United States presence there, the area having been used and abused by the American navy for its own purposes? Is he further aware that other

employment opportunities there have been neglected because of the false economy that has been created around the American military presence? Will he give an assurance that assistance will be provided by the British and American Governments to restore a proper, stable economy to that part of Scotland?

Mr. King: I much preferred the account that was given by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) of the relationship between the local people and the United States navy in the use of the base——

Mr. Wilson: I come from there.

Mr. King: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman comes from the area, but I still preferred the account given by the hon. Lady. I do not know whether a campaign is starting on the Opposition Benches to prove how utterly futile and pointless it was to demonstrate 30 years ago. It did precisely nothing. How much more sensible it would have been to have left it to a sane and reasonable decision to be taken by the Government 30 years later, when the job had been done.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that I have called hon. Members whose constituencies are directly affected. If not, I shall certainly call those with a constituency interest. I appeal for brief and not repetitious questions.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): My right hon. Friend will be aware that Lakenheath is on the edge of my constituency and has a widespread effect on many parts of the area. The news he has announced today will be received with mixed feelings—with pleasure that it has been found possible to make the changes, but with concern about the effect on the local economy. Can he give more information about the changes at Lakenheath, particularly about the level of reduction in American personnel, civilian and service, remembering the effect that that will have on the economy of the area?

Mr. King: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern. I said that I could not give details today. I can only say that the changes will begin in 1992 and that it is intended that they will be completed by 1994. The present proposals will mean moving from one wing to slightly less than one wing at Lakenheath. Although there will be fewer aircraft there, I cannot advise my hon. Friend of the precise effect that that will have on the numbers involved. Now that the announcement has been made, I appreciate that further discussion will occur and that my hon. Friend will wish to be involved in that process.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Minister explain in what circumstances the United States may want to send cruise missiles into Holy Loch if the base is closed? Will he describe in what circumstances he would think it fit for cruise missiles to visit Holy Loch—or have not his American partners told him yet?

Mr. King: I am not sure why the hon. Lady asked that question. I may have misunderstood the point made by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) but I know of no proposal to base anything in Holy Loch in future. I am unaware whether there may be periodic visits, but that is a possibility.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while his announcement is welcome in general terms, it could have implications for the Government's defence review, "Options for Change"? Does he further agree that, as the review was instigated before the change in the Soviet policy towards the Baltic states and before the outbreak of the Gulf war, Conservative Members are concerned that the Government should seek to reflect that in any changes made?

Mr. King: I can give that assurance. I, of all people, am concerned about that because I saw at first hand some of the problems we faced when making our contribution to the Gulf. Any lessons that we have been, and are, learning will be taken into account when considering "Options for Change".

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I join my colleagues in welcoming the end of the menance in the Clyde, which will also be welcomed by the fishermen, who constantly find submarines bumping into their boats or caught in their nets. We now know that 30 years ago Harold Macmillan and his Cabinet wanted the site to be not at Holy Loch but at Loch Linnhe, in the north of Scotland. However, President Eisenhower successfully insisted that it should be sited at Holy Loch. Will the Secretary of State assure us that the relationship between the two Governments has changed in the past 30 years and that if there were to be a new facility the decision would be made by the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Defence and not by the United States Secretary of State for Defence?

Mr. King: I certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. I am interested in that bit of history, about which I was quite unaware. I am unable to compare the relative relationships between the Eisenhower and Bush Administrations and the British Government. The present relationship between the American and British Governments is extremely close and co-operative and we shall take as constructive an approach as possible.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): My right hon. Friend knows that Portland is occasionally used for rest and recreation by American submarine crews visiting this country. Will the closure of Holy Loch increase the incidence of people coming to visit and the need to use the naval dockyard for emergency repairs to Trident submarines and others?

Mr. King: I cannot comment on that. I note my hon. Friend's interest and I know of his loyal support for Portland. I know that those visiting Portland will receive a warm welcome.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Does the Secretary of state agree that what are likely to be continuing reductions in the United States force levels underline the case for Europe to seek a closer defence co-operation and not to waste time chasing the moonbeam of a European defence force?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman's question takes us a little wider, but it emphasises that while the changes are being made by the United States, that country is determined to maintain and modernise its contribution of stationed forces in Europe. That element of the announcement will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As the F15Es are being based at Lincoln, may we have the clear assurance that the legally significant assurances given by our country in 1978 that a nuclear state would never attack a non-nuclear state are still confirmed? Will the Secretary of State say something about the dual key system that is apparently still in operation, whereby the Americans cannot use nuclear weapons without the clear understanding of No. 10 Downing street?

Mr. King: That is precisely the point, and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised it. On 12 May 1983, my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister said:

"The effect of the understandings and the arrangements for implementing them is that no nuclear weapon would be fired or launched from British territory without the agreement of the British Prime Minister."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1983; Vol. 42, c. *433*.]

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Will the Secretary of State advise the House of the estimated loss of jobs arising from the closure? As the American submarines have been the cause of many serious accidents and damage to fishing boats from Northern Ireland in the Irish sea, will the right hon. Gentleman, in the last few months of the operation of the American submarines, make a further request to the authorities to ensure better co-operation with fishing fleet in the Irish sea so that there are no further accidents in the last remaining months?

Mr. King: I take it that the right hon. Gentleman is referring to the closure of the base at Holy Loch which will result in the loss of 80 full-time United States-employed United Kingdom civilian jobs, 65 part-time jobs and about 20 Ministry of Defence civilian jobs, mainly with the Ministry of Defence police. The serious economic consequences will result from the departure of some 2,000 American employees with some 1,600 dependants. The loss of economic benefits to the local community has been estimated at about $50 million. That is a significant matter. The closure will lead to a reduction of submarine traffic in the Irish sea.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Do the British and United States Treasuries have contingency plans? The Secretary of State has said nothing about finance. What are his plans?

Mr. King: I referred in my statement to the particular interests of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is aware of these matters, to which he is giving particular attention. I also referred to the fact that a number of people involved are United States employees and the United States will wish to treat with them as fairly as possible. The United States is conscious of the good relations that have existed between them and it is grateful for that. It is conscious of the economic consequences that will flow from the decisions and is anxious to see how it can help in that respect.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): My constituency is one of those that faces on to Holy Loch, and I can assure the Secretary of State that there will be much disappointment at the closure of the base and its terrible economic consequences on the surrounding areas. Others will be delighted to see the closure of the base for many reasons, one of which is that the River Clyde was once famous for its holidaymakers, and I am convinced that once the base has closed, and if the Government take an urgent look at the problems of the Clyde, thousands of people may once again return to spend their money in one of the most beautiful parts of the world, and the Americans will follow them. Will the Secretary of State urgently meet his colleagues in Scotland to discuss the economic crisis which will follow the closure of the base?

Mr. King: Having lived and worked in that area, and knowing the Clyde well, I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said about the beauty of the area and its potential for tourist development. The closure of the base has serious economic implications and I imagine that the people involved will have a lot of sympathy for the views expressed by the hon. Gentleman than with those expressed by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who did not seem to care whether they had a job or not.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) did not say that good relations were built up —she said that people got married? The Secretary of State seems to be confused in his thinking. Can he explain to a simple soul like me, who 30 years ago was too young to stand on the pier, why he feels that it is so important to keep nuclear weapons in Britain to secure the peace in Europe and, conversely, so important to get rid of them in the middle east to secure the peace in the middle east?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that the Soviet Union possesses a massive nuclear arsenal. In the judgment of many—and I personally believe this very strongly—peace has been kept for the longest period this century in Europe because of the existence of the nuclear deterrent. No doubt I shall have an opportunity to explain this point at greater length to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): The Secretary of State should come clean. The withdrawal of American forces from Holy Loch has nothing to do with the peaceful intentions of the American ruling class. It is all to do with economics, and with the fact that America is the biggest debtor country in the world. That has been made clear by George Bush's budget. Can we help him along the way? Can we get George Bush on his nuclear bike so that all American forces in Britain are withdrawn? That is the will of the British people and the Secretary of State can put that to the test by holding a referendum. The peace movement is growing throughout the country and it will develop to challenge the Government—and even to challenge the Labour party.

Mr. King: I am interested that the hon. Gentleman invites me to come clean. For all the serious economic problems that America faces—and there is no doubt about its deficit—when it is challenged, and when the American people have a duty and a responsibility to take action, they do not hesitate. That is clear from my statement today. The Americans are not turning their back on Europe. They are not abandoning their NATO commitments. They are modernising their forces and continuing to honour their commitment to NATO and to the defence of Europe.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does the Secretary of State accept that the Government have belatedly caught up with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and have accepted their arguments, even if it is rather late in the day? Does he agree that we must move to get rid of other

nuclear weapons? As a matter of interest, do the Government have a right of veto over the use of United States nuclear capable planes based at Upper Heyford and Lakenheath? Has the agreement made in October 1951 between President Truman and Prime Minister Attlee—that there would be joint decision-making only in the light of prevailing circumstances—been altered? Is there a specific agreement giving a right of veto? If so, will the Secretary of State direct me to it?

Mr. King: It would be extraordinarily silly of the hon. Gentleman to view my statement today as a victory for those who protested against a nuclear base at Holy Loch. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that it is the intention of the United States to maintain its missile submarines and nuclear deterrent. It happens that the new Trident submarines have a much bigger range, and do not need a forward operating base in the eastern Atlantic.

The precise statement that I made to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) also answers the hon. Gentleman's question. I will read it again. It confirms that "no nuclear weapon would be fired or launched from British territory without the agreement of the British Prime Minister."

I trust that the hon. Gentleman does not want to challenge that, and that he thinks it is right. I give that assurance to the House.

Point of Order

4.13 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I have your permission, Mr. Speaker, to raise, under Standing Order No. 20, the subject of the United Nations Secretary-General distancing himself from the coalition?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows that I cannot grant the application that he wants to make today. I know that he feels strongly about the matter in question, but I must protect the spirit of the rules that cover Standing Order No. 20 applications. If the procedure is abused, it will put in jeopardy a prized opportunity for Back Benchers to raise legitimate requests for an emergency debate in prime time.

I remind the House of what I have said in the past. The right to make a three-minute submission to me on a new and urgent matter at 3.30 pm represents a valuable and very important opportunity for Back-Bench Members. I am anxious that it should not be devalued or threatened, as might be the case if the procedure were to be abused. I hope that I shall always have the support of the House in declining to hear applications that do not fall into that category.

BILL PRESENTED

Football (Offences)

Sir John Wheeler, supported by Mr. David Ashby, Mr. Joseph Ashton, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Dame Janet Fookes, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Keith Vaz, Dr. Mike Woodcock and Mr. Tom Pendry, presented a Bill to define offences and prescribe penalties in respect of certain conduct at football matches; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 72.]

Domestic Lettings

4.14 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law to relax certain requirements upon a private householder taking in not more than two lodgers, in respect of taxation, the unified business rate, and the provisions of the Rent Acts; and for connected purposes.

My Bill will concern itself with small domestic lettings and will tackle the pressing problem of homelessness, which is a blot on our society. Today in *The Times* a letter from Shelter claims that homelessness is

"the result of too little affordable rented accommodation."

The tragedy to my mind is that homelessness exists while there is a surfeit of accommodation. There is plenty of accommodation in private houses, but people will not rent it out. My proposal would unlock this housing so that homeless people could come in from the cold.

There are many reasons why people find themselves homeless. A common reason is that young people who have always wanted to leave home and set up on their own cannot find anywhere to live nowadays. Once upon a time one could look in any local newspaper, or in the local sweet shop, and see lots of advertisements for bedsits or furnished flats to let. People with rooms to spare were willing to let them for a modest sum. There was much competition, which kept prices down. Sometimes letting helped to pay the landlord's mortgage or rent. Sometimes the family had left home and people felt that they would like a little company. Many a lonely young person, coming to the city, found a surrogate mother in the company of a friendly landlady—someone to keep an eye on him, and someone to come home to in the evening and to tell about the events of the day.

The landlord or the landlady was rarely too worried about getting a lot of money in advance. Often they would take people in for a week's rent only and they rarely wanted references. They would judge people at face value and let them into their homes. If the arrangements did not work out they would give notice, but that was not a tragedy because there was always somewhere else just down the road where one could find alternative accommodation.

Tenants were not harmed by that liberal, liberated system. That is what happens when there is a free market in any service—there is always a supply to meet demand.

Even young couples, after they got married, frequently started married life in a bedsit or in a furnished flat. It enabled them to save money and build up the capital to buy a place of their own.

Something has happened which has destroyed people's willingness to let parts of their houses. The Rent Acts are still a spectre facing people who rent out homes, as is the prospect of the taxman breathing down their necks wanting part of the rent, or of complicated accounts to reduce the amount of liability, or of the local town hall and the prospect of being re-rated.

I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) who, when he was Minister for housing, liberated furnished lettings, especially rooms to let, and went a long way towards making the landlord more comfortable. Nowadays, if a landlord has to give notice to a tenant in a private household, he does not have to go to the county court, but can simply serve notice and the tenant has to go. If a

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

landlord has fewer than six lodgers, he is not liable to be re-rated as a boarding house. Many liberal measures have been introduced, but the popular terror still exists in the public's mind about being a landlord.

Instead of tackling the causes, we tend to spend more money on providing hostel or bed-and-breakfast accommodation, at enormous expense to the taxpayer.

I talked to many homeless people in the Westminster area when I was a member of Westminster city council and deputy chairman of the housing committee. When I asked people what they wanted, they told me that they did not want a room in a hostel, however nice it might be. They wanted a room in a home—somewhere to leave their belongings, an address, somewhere where they could lock the door and could call home. That is what we should be aiming for, rather than providing more hostel accommodation. The Government are spending £5 million a week on many of those cold and friendless alternatives to homes in the private rented sector.

Although Ministers agree privately that what we are up to is a kind of madness, we are still afraid to tackle the cause of the blockage. I believe that the cause is the caricature of the private landlord as a Rachman—a caricature which the Labour party always drags out as a means of boosting public housing, public spending and public control. The other bogeyman for the would-be landlord is the Treasury, which regards letting rooms as a black economy activity, and wants every last farthing that it can get out of the rent.

The Department has already done a great deal to liberate the housing sector. I want it to go a step further and stand up for homeless people and against the bullyragging nonsense that we hear from the Labour party. I want it to reassure people that if they let their accommodation, they will receive a bonus. They could take in up to two lodgers and make £100 in rent—which is none the less much less than we pay for a hostel or bed-and-breakfast places. If the arrangement did not work out, landlords could part company with their tenants—as they can now—without having to go through the awful trauma of rent tribunals and county courts.

I am sure that that would liberate an enormous amount of housing, without adding a penny to the taxpayer's bill. Moreover, it would provide a surrogate, or alternative, for the young, the not-so-favourably disposed, the unemployed and the friendless, in a warm home where they would receive the support and company that they probably expected originally from their own families.

4.21 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I oppose the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman).

My hon. Friend's heart is, of course, in the right place; the problem is that her Bill has been so narrowly drafted that it does not, in my view, adequately address the problem that she has so properly brought to our notice. In my hon. Friend's immortal words, her aim is to bring lodgers back to the bosom of the landlady. That is a laudable aim. We know exactly what my hon. Friend means and exactly what she wants: she wants, as she said, to reduce the pressure on housing, especially for single people. She wants to do that by giving a boost to private renting, which always used to be a major source of accommodation—especially for single people.

I fear—and I know that my hon. Friend shares my view—that the problems of private renting go much deeper and are much more profound than the difficulties faced by those wishing to find private shared accommodation, although their difficulties are, of course, an inextricable part of the wider problem. Private renting in this country—unlike private renting in any other country in the western world—has collapsed. In the 1950s it represented about 50 per cent. of all accommodation; today it represents about 7 per cent. At the same time, there are about 600,000 empty private sector houses, as my hon. Friend pointed out. Many are not rented out because their owners are literally terrified of the consequences of doing so.

Thirty years of socialist denigration of the landlord and landlady has taken its toll. As a result, the potential penalties of renting out their property, or one room of it, are considered by most people far to outweigh the meagre rewards. My hon. Friend stressed that, and the implications for the use of the national housing stock are extremely serious. If even one third of the empty private sector housing were put out for rent many of the present pressures on housing would be removed without a single new building.

I know that in the current mood, we are not really allowed to be confrontational and far be it from me to disturb the tranquillity of the House, but I should like to make one small, innocent, well-meaning observation about the socialist party's policy towards private renting. Its programme, now printed formally in its policy documents, of reintroducing total security of tenure to new as well as to old lodgings, and presumably thus to shared lodgings, would, if implemented, finally kill the private rented sector stone dead with or without the Bill which my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay has brought before the House today.

Labour's policy is already acting as a serious deterrent to new landlords coming forward and it is directly and detrimentally affecting the position of thousands of people looking for homes.

I should have liked to see in my hon. Friend's Bill, with all its excellent intentions for the provision of extra accommodation, some mention of something that she herself has championed in recent years—the future deregulation of tenancies. We should at least ensure that people who succeed to existing regulated tenancies should do so through contracts freely entered into by them and their landlords, as is the case now for assured tenancies and for shortholds. It is also necessary to treat the operations of landlords for tax purposes in the same way as any other business would be. Their capital expenditure should certainly benefit from roll-over rules. I believe that it would have been better if my hon. Friend's Bill had addressed that point.

My hon. Friend has done the House a great service by raising the matter of privately rented accommodation. I want her to reapply her genius to the wider context in which lodging must be seen, take this Bill away and bring back an amended version, perhaps more along the lines of the one that she presented to the House some months ago.

Mr. Speaker: The Question is that the hon. Lady be given leave to bring in the Bill. Those in favour say aye; to

the contrary no. The hon. Member who has spoken against the Bill must follow his objection by recording a no call. I think that the ayes have it.

Question agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mrs. Gorman: Mr. David Shaw, Sir Marcus Fox, Mrs. Maureen Hicks, Mr. Christopher Gill, Mr. James Pawsey, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. Michael Spicer, Mr. Barry Field, Mrs. Rosie Barnes and myself, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that it is possible for the hon. Member who has just opposed the Bill to be also listed as a sponsor of the Bill. Perhaps his name could be deleted.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Mr. David Shaw, Sir Marcus Fox, Mrs. Maureen Hicks, Mr. Christopher Gill, Mr. James Pawsey, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. Barry Field and Mrs. Rosie Barnes.

Domestic Lettings

Mrs. Teresa Gorman accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law to relax certain requirements upon a private householder taking in not more than two lodgers, in respect of taxation, the unified business rate, and the provisions of the Rent Acts; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 40.]

4.29 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have often referred to the need to protect our procedure against abuse. Today we have had the introduction of a ten-minute Bill. Normally, those who object do so out of conviction, because they totally oppose what the hon. Member presenting the Bill is trying to do. Not in all cases, but normally, as you know, the opposition comes from the other side. The hon. Gentleman who opposed the Bill today obviously had no real conviction. That was shown by the fact that his name was included as a supporter of the Bill.

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that what we have witnessed is a mockery and a denial of the opportunity for Opposition Members to oppose the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). That mockery of our procedure should not be repeated.

Mr. Speaker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it should not be repeated. The purpose of speaking against a Bill is to raise objections, not to support a Bill that has been put before the House. *[Interruption.]* I do not know that the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) was doing that today. It is not an opportunity to have a second bite at a ten-minute motion. Moreover, interruptions are not allowed during proceedings on a ten-minute Bill. The procedure should be kept pure. In future, we should proceed as the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) suggests.

Orders of the Day

Statutory Sick Pay Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that it is for the convenience of the House that all the Lords amendments should be considered together.

4.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I share your understanding, Mr. Speaker, that it would seem to be for the convenience of the House that all the Lords amendments should be discussed together, but in the interests of the rules of procedure perhaps I should move formally that the House agrees with Lords amendment No. 1.

Clause 1

Reduction in the amounts recoverable by employers who have paid statutory sick pay

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 12, leave out ""so paid"" and insert ""by making"".

Mr. Newton: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the remaining Lords amendments.

Mr. Newton: This small Government amendment is designed to pave the way for others. It was accepted in another place, but it does not form the major focus of our debate. I shall seek to discuss the issues raised by all the amendments, including the Government amendments to one of the Lords amendments.

In setting the case before the House, it is sensible for me to remind hon. Members that the Bill deals with only two aspects of a much wider package of changes, some of which will come before the House in other ways. However, they will need to be discussed and considered as a whole. I am sure that that will seem to be a sensible procedure both to the Opposition and to my hon. Friends.

The Bill proposes to reduce the rate of reimbursement for employers' payments of statutory sick pay from 100 per cent. to 80 per cent. It also—this is a small matter but it should at least be noted—ends the arrangements whereby employers are able to claim reimbursement of the national insurance contributions paid on statutory sick pay. That arrangement was introduced only in 1985 after the introduction of statutory sick pay and has not worked very well in practice. Some 25 per cent. of the compensation due under that heading does not appear to be claimed, despite the various efforts which have been made to draw it to the attention of employers.

Alongside the proposals in the Bill, we have also proposed to leave the higher rate of statutory sick pay unaltered, at £52·50 per week, while increasing the lower rate from £39·25 to £43·50 and to extend the earnings bands to which the lower rate applies.

Another point—perhaps the most important from the point of view of the balance of our debate, and one that has not been given its due weight in much that has been said and written on these matters in recent weeks—is that

[Mr. Newton]

we have proposed a significant reduction in the national insurance contributions payable by employers, weighted towards giving greater help in particular to the employers of those who are less well paid, who tend disproportionately to be small employers. We shall undoubtedly return to that point.

Taking all three elements together, we have what may broadly be described as about £350 million on one side of the account—mostly through reduced expenditure—and £250 million on the other side, in the form of reduced employers' contribution rates, leading to a net overall effect for employers of around £100 million.

To put that figure in context, I should make two main points. First, total labour costs in our economy are about £300 billion. Thus, the £100 million represents about 0·03 per cent.—less than one twentieth of 1 per cent. of the labour costs of industry as a whole.

The second is a rather wider point—that this very limited change should be seen in the light of trends well established over many years. Support for those in employment who are sick for short periods has, as a matter of experience and observation, moved increasingly from being something for which the state alone has been responsible to being a partnership between the state and employers, with the latter taking an increasingly important share.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): My right hon. Friend has stated the costs as percentages of employers' overall costs. Another way of putting it is to say that the average cost to an employer is only £5 per annum per employee. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is surprising that, as the cost is so low, there has been so much opposition to the Bill? Does not the director of the CBI seem to be arguing about mere bantam feed?

Mr. Newton: I have not done precisely the calculation that appears to underlie my hon. Friend's point, but I think that its basic thrust is right. Of course, one must allow for the fact that a significant number of employees —I am thinking, in particular, of part-time employees who deliberately keep their earnings below the lower limit—will not qualify for statutory sick pay at all. Perhaps that affects my hon. Friend's figures to a small extent.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): We should be very careful about using averages. As the incidence is unequal, the burden on companies will be disproportionate. That is the essence of the Bill and of the opposition to it.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is seeking to lead me on. I promise that it will not be long before I come to discuss the small employers, who, obviously, are less able to be certain that the averages will apply to them. On the whole, it is true that the larger a firm or undertaking, the more likely it is that the averages will apply in its case. I understand well that that is the cause of some of the concern about small employers that has led to a number of the proposed amendments. At an earlier stage the Government gave a clear-cut undertaking that we would try to meet the concern expressed on behalf of small employers about averages not applying to them. I am seeking, with some amendments to the Lords amendments, to fulfil that undertaking.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Before the Secretary of State moves on to what I know will be the kernel of the debate—the effects of these measures on small companies—will he take on board the fact that some large companies, for which, I understand, there may be less sympathy, are faced with a very considerable additional bill? I am told that Marks and Spencer will have to pay £600,000 extra. I think it is fair to say that there was a clear implication that Government reimbursement of 100 per cent. of the cost was the basis on which the original scheme was introduced. Does not my right hon. Friend think that it would be wise to say just a few words about the movement away from that basic principle, which caused some of us to support the original scheme some years ago?

Mr. Newton: I am very happy to say a few words about that matter. Perhaps I should preface my remarks by saying that a point along the lines of that which my hon. Friend has just raised was made by a number of people in business. Naturally, as a consequence, I have had a very careful search made of everything that was said in the House and of any other traceable comments that were made when these proposals were being discussed very nearly a decade ago. I have been quite unable to find any commitment of the kind that my hon. Friend implies existed. Moreover, during that decade there have been two changes of Parliament.

It is well understood that Governments must take a new look at circumstances as they change. Two of the changes in circumstances to which I was about to refer are the spread of occupational sick pay schemes and the rising pressure of other demands. My hon. Friend is noted for his support for demands for expenditure on forms of social security which employers cannot possibly be expected to provide.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): The Secretary of State says that he has checked the sources of this commitment. Has he examined the proceedings of the Conservative party conference? Is he aware that on 15 October 1981 the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), his predecessor, gave a clear and unequivocal commitment that there would be 100 per cent. reimbursement? As the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) said, that was the basis on which the original scheme was introduced. Is he unaware of that, or is the Conservative party conference not a serious public body?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend's remarks were directed to the outcome of the negotiations on the original statutory sick pay scheme. My noble Friend Lord Jenkin, who was responsible for most of the negotiations prior to the introduction of SSP, has not suggested any express or implied commitment that there would never be a stage at which, regardless of developments surrounding occupational sick pay schemes or other demands on the social security system, a future Government would consider the balance of provision. Indeed, it would not have been possible to make such a meaningful commitment that would stand for ever.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Is not the Secretary of State trying to confuse two issues to his own advantage —first, whether a commitment was given and where it was given and, secondly, whether events have moved on since and whether other developments have overridden the

original commitment? Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) put to him? Was that commitment given to the Conservative party conference?

Mr. Newton: I have already answered the point made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). I cannot add to what I have said.

Mr. Frank Field: Yes or no.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman asked whether there had been developments in the intervening period. One of the developments, to which I have referred several times, has been the continuing growth of occupational sick pay schemes. The latest survey in 1988 showed that they are used by employers responsible for more than 90 per cent. of the work force. At the same time—the hon. Member for Oldham, West has tended, not to disguise, that would be unfair, but not to acknowledge this point significantly clearly—there has been particularly rapid growth in occupational sick pay schemes for manual workers. The old caricature was that staff had occupational sick pay schemes but manual workers were left to cope for themselves. There has been a significant change in that respect since the mid 1970s.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I wish to take the Secretary of State back to the point made by the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who claimed that the cost to employers is small because although there is a drop in reimbursement from 100 per cent. to 80 per cent. there is an offsetting cut in national insurance. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that is a one-off and that there is no promise for future years? This is an insidious proposal which, in time, will cost employers more and more. Will he put that on the record?

4.45 pm

Mr. Newton: I do not see how it can cost more. Contribution rates are calculated as a percentage of earnings. As earnings rise, the value of the reductions in national insurance contributions will rise. I am not in a position to speculate about decisions on future rates of statutory sick pay, or on what employers would do if they chose to go further in the development of occupational sick pay schemes. The Bill seeks to fix a proportion of the amount of statutory sick pay which employers would be expected to shoulder for themselves rather than pass on to the state and a reduction in national insurance contributions, which, as long as percentage rates of contributions remain unchanged, will rise in value to employers with the natural growth in earnings. I hope that that is reasonably clear.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Employers' organisations calculate that it will cost employers £100 million to implement the scheme. Is the Secretary of State saying that that is untrue?

Mr. Newton: On the contrary. A fairly substantial paragraph in my speech, which I probably read some minutes ago because I willingly accepted several interventions, related that to the total of employers' labour costs in the economy. There is roughly a £100 million gap between one side of the account and the other. That is equivalent to less than one twentieth of 1 per cent. of labour costs in the economy.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Minister has repeated the claim that was made in the last debate that 91 per cent. of the work force are covered by occupational pension schemes. The IFF Research Ltd. report says something quite different—that 91 per cent. of employers have sick pay schemes that cover some employees in some circumstances. That is all, and the percentage covered is nearer 48 per cent. or 50 per cent.

Mr. Newton: I think that my remarks were accurate and reflected what the hon. Gentleman has just said.

Ms. Short: The Secretary of State is being economical with the truth.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Lady, from a sedentary position, is accusing me of being economical with the truth I shall do my best to restrain what would normally be my natural irritation.

Some of the points towards which the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) seems to be edging run the risk of being somewhat misleading. Of course there are exclusions from occupational sick pay schemes, but they are not, on the whole, exclusions of the old-fashioned gentleman versus players kind. There is increasing coverage of those in manual occupations. The exclusions from occupational sick pay schemes usually relate to a brief period at the start of a new job. There may be a qualifying rule that an employee must be with the firm three or six months before qualifying. That is not unreasonable, and as a matter of established record people tend to experience little sickness in the early months of a new job.

The other main exclusion is part-time employees. The Opposition have tended to place too much weight on this point—I can see where their argument is leading—because, by and large, the earnings of part-time employees qualify them only for the lower rate of statutory sick pay, which is being fully uprated and which was fully uprated last year. If I get the drift of where the hon. Member for Newport, West is seeking to take me, which is a bit aside of the main thrust of the debate, he will see that I do not really agree with what he is trying to say.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: My hon. Friend seems to be linking the reduction in national insurance contributions with the statutory sick pay proposal. As I understand what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People said in earlier discussions, there is no link: they stand independently of each other. It is therefore misleading of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to link them together as though it is a cost reduction. He might just as well cite those who have saved on the uniform business rate as being better able to make a payment on a different account. That link is misleading.

Mr. Newton: That is a little unfair of my hon. Friend., I have made it quite clear on this and on several other occasions that distinct judgments must be made. The Bill does not cover national insurance contributions. The House will be invited to discuss a national contributions order in due course. The judgment that I made on what it is sensible to do in respect of SSP—this should already be clear—was informed by a parallel judgment that I had made about what I could do for employers on national insurance contributions. That was a perfectly sensible way for me to have approached the matter, and one which most hon. Members would support.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): We acknowledge the difficult task which my right hon. Friend has in trying to juggle the social security budget, particularly in dealing with the Treasury. That is well understood. Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is not simply the additional cost about which my constituents are concerned but the fact that, when statutory sick pay was introduced, they were required to administer what was essentially a Government system on behalf of the Government, and that that imposed burdens on industry? Had they been told then that they would not get 100 per cent. reimbursement, I suspect that their answer would have been, "You can stuff your scheme and do it yourselves."

Mr. Newton: This is another area about which there has been prolonged argument. I have already referred to the rather strange and not particularly effective arrangement for compensation for national insurance contributions paid on SSP itself. That is the nearest that anyone has ever come to compensating employers directly for their administration of the scheme. My hon. Friend will find that at the outset there was not any form of direct compensation. That was one of the points at issue. In retrospect, the majority of employers have found the SSP scheme easier to administer than they had originally expected. All the evidence is that it is now generally working well, with relatively little burden for employers. I do not seek to say this in a bland way, but in some respects what I am proposing, with the elimination of the rather strange compensation for the NICs bit of the scheme, will make it simpler than it is at present.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): As I have said before to my right hon. Friend, it seems an extraordinary time to introduce added burdens for business, and above all for small business. My right hon. Friend will be able to draw away some of the criticism if he can tell us what the net effect will be on a firm with five or six employees, on average earnings, if one employee is off sick for six months. Will there be a net added cost to the firm, or will it gain? There is concern about the danger of added cost to a very small firm. If my right hon. Friend can assure the House that the new proposals sort out that problem, he will have answered quite a lot of criticism.

Mr. Newton: I shall be coming in a few moments to the case of small firms, both of the kind mentioned by my hon. Friend and others. He has referred to an employee being sick for six months. The main purpose of a significant concession in one of the rather complex Government amendments, relating back to an earlier amendment in another place, is to provide that small employers, defined on a fairly generous basis, can go back to 100 per cent. reimbursement in respect of any employee who is sick for more than six weeks. That is a significant end-stop safeguard for exactly the kind of problem that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Secretary of State has introduced a complex Government amendment referring to six weeks. Can he give us an insight into Government thinking on this? My understanding is that all the discussions in another place were based on studies which showed that the average length of sickness was three weeks. It seems that the period of six weeks has been plucked out of the air without any principle behind it. If the Secretary of State is making a serious attempt to be helpful to small businesses, why does he not make the period three weeks?

Mr. Newton: In a nutshell, the position is that quite a number of small businesses will still be in pocket overall as a result of my proposals, because the national insurance contribution rate reductions have been geared especially to smaller employers, via being geared to lower paid employees. There will still be a large number of employers who will be better off on a straightforward calculation of the balance between the extra SSP which they have to pay and the reduced contributions from which they benefit, even up to twice average sickness, which would be one employee being sick for six weeks in the case which the hon. Gentleman seems to have in mind. We have chosen a number of weeks which we think will safeguard those employers who might otherwise be affected by rates of sickness significantly above average. I hope that I will be able to make the point clearer later in my speech.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that sickness management is an employer responsibility, that the Government have gone far enough in offering assistance to employers to look after the sickness management of employees, that any responsible employer already takes care of sickness management and that more employers should do so? I support the Bill.

Mr. Newton: That point has been made by a number of commentators, including most recently *The Times* in an editorial today, and the *Financial Times* in an editorial a week or two ago; certainly the point should not be overlooked in the argument. Indeed, I find it mildly ironic that the CBI has published a survey suggesting that British industry is cost many billions a year by absenteeism and pointing to the more determined methods to keep absenteeism under control which are used in some other countries. I have not sought to put great weight on that argument, and I do not want to mislead my hon. Friends or anybody else. There may be some force in it but it is not the reason for the proposals being brought before the House, and I do not pretend that it is.

I want to come briefly, I hope—otherwise there will be no opportunity for anyone else to speak—to the major reason why the proposals have been brought before the House. As I have said, against the background of the continued expansion of occupational sick pay schemes, not least into the manual work force, we felt that it was right to make a limited further adjustment in the balance of provision as between the state and employers. I must underline that point. We have taken account of the many understandable demands pressed upon the social security budget for purposes for which employers certainly cannot be expected to provide—for example, the less well-off pensioners for whom I found nearly another £100 million in the uprating, following £200 million in the form of extra premiums in October 1989,for those who need help in residential care or nursing homes, for whom the uprating statement brought nearly another £250 million, and for those who are long-term sick and disabled. Certainly there has been a very wide welcome for the measures which I was able to announce to help precisely those groups and, indeed, for the earlier announcement of major improvements in disability benefits worth some £300 million, which the House will debate on Thursday.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): No one can disagree with the wish of my right hon. Friend to help the disadvantaged. But why does he do that by disadvantaging small business? That is where I do not see the logic.

Mr. Newton: I am coming to small business. I think my hon. Friend will find that many small businesses are on balance advantaged rather than disadvantaged by the proposals which I have brought before the House.

I seek to conclude this part of my speech by saying simply—this is directly related to the point which my hon. Friend has raised—that the first question the House must address in considering the amendments is whether, in relation to the improvements in social security which we are making, which are worth many hundreds of millions of pounds for purposes commanding universal support, which have been pressed on me by many of my hon. Friends and by many Opposition Members, and on which I am constantly pressed to go further, it is reasonable to ask for a modest contribution from industry amounting to a small fraction of the improvements and amounting to less than one twentieth of 1 per cent. of their labour costs. The purpose of the main Lords amendment—amending 80 per cent. to 91 per cent.—is to eliminate even that very small contribution from employers to the improvements in social security to which I have referred. It is not realistic for that to be the position and I cannot, therefore, advise the House to accept Lords amendment No. 3.

5 pm

Sir Robert McCrindle: I have listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend has said in response to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller). Is he telling us that as we evaluate the desirable advances in social services provision—over which he has presided and for which I give him full credit—we must offset against that the possibility that employers, whether small or large, will have to make some contribution? Should we be wise to assume that it is no longer correct to take as sacrosanct other schemes, such as statutory maternity pay? Is my right hon. Friend telling us that an occasion may arise when, as he is doing today with statutory sick pay, he may find it necessary to make the employer additionally responsible for the maternity scheme, if that is the price that we have to pay for improving social benefits?

Mr. Newton: There are two separate points in my hon. Friend's intervention. If significant improvements in social security, or in any other form of spending on welfare or for other purposes, are undertaken, there is no way in which employers collectively—industry as a whole—can be insulated from the effects. The costs will have to fall somewhere. If the hon. Member for Oldham, West were allowed the chance—and we all devoutly hope that he will not be—he would raise the overall rate of employers' national insurance contribution, he would raise the rate of corporation tax and he would almost certainly raise the rate of income tax in a way that would cause a great deal more difficulty to many small businesses than any of my proposals in the Bill.

Mr. Meacher: I did not think that I needed to make this point to the House. However, what the Secretary of State has just said is wholly groundless. There is not a single shred of evidence in anything that I have ever said or written that would justify his comment. If that is the only basis on which he can justify these impositions on small businesses, it shows his arguments totally lack support.

Mr. Newton: Only this weekend, I saw in one of the Sunday newspapers a reiteration by one of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues who has recently joined the Opposition Front Bench of what purported to be a Labour promise to pay additional pensions. Would the hon. Gentleman like to say how that will be paid for?

Mr. Meacher: That question is wholly irrelevant to our discussion today. But as the right hon. Gentleman has raised it, I will answer. We made it perfectly clear in our policy document—there was no great revelation in a Sunday newspaper—that, unlike the Government, we believe that older pensioners who are aged over 75 or 80 are completely without extra support, bearing in mind the way that the Government have cut the earnings relation when uprating pensions. We believe that those older pensioners need extra assistance. We intend to provide that, partly through the state earnings-related pension scheme and, if necessary, through some additional pension.

Mr. Newton: I may have evaded one or two questions in my time, but I have never heard a question so wholly and hopelessly evaded in response to an entirely reasonable request. If one makes promises of several billion pounds of additional expenditure from the national insurance fund——

Mr. Meacher: No.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman seems to be going round the country—and some of his hon. Friends certainly are—promising several pounds a week extra to 10 million pensioners. If he can explain how he will fund that without a major increase in national insurance contributions, either at the expense of employees or, far more likely, at the expense of employers, I should be happy to listen. The point that I want to make to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) is that none of that could be cost free. I do not want to turn this debate into a wrangle with the Opposition. However, I must make the point that in one form or another, the business community and individuals, according to the balance of judgment that particular Governments take, would have to find the cost of improvements to social security.

I do not ask my hon. Friends to say that they think that we have got the balance of judgment right in everything that we have done over the past 10 years, but I ask them—and I address this especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who has a commendable track record in urging various improvements—to accept that it is difficult for the Secretary of State for Social Security to make all the improvements and then not to receive support for some of the ways in which one has to find room to manoeuvre to make them. I ask for understanding at least in that respect and I suspect that I have it from my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who is not only honourable, but an old friend from Essex in many other ways.

Ms. Short: But not Essex man?

Mr. Newton: The phrase "Essex man" had not come into my mind either as a description of myself or of my hon. Friend, but it cannot be denied that we both come from Essex.

I have explained the strategic background to the proposals, so I want to come directly to the position of small employers, which has been the subject of particular concern, as has been clear this afternoon, even among those—and there are many—who accept the general approach that I have described. I turn now to Government amendments (a) to (e) to Lords amendment No. 7, which set out the Government's proposals for assisting small employers who experience abnormal levels of sickness in their work force on the basis of enabling them to revert to a 100 per cent. reimbursement after an employee has been sick for a specified time.

Many hon. Members who have studied the debate in another place will know that my noble Friend Lord Henley tabled an amendment on Report on the Government's behalf. The Government had already clearly shown that they were listening to that concern. The amendment formed the basis of the new clause today. It was further amended on Third Reading in another place when more specific proposals were written in, to which I shall return in a moment.

I want to say a word or two about the background. It is again important to recognise that the effects of the changes in statutory sick pay in the Bill are not sensibly seen in isolation from the proposals that I have announced for reductions in employers' national insurance contributions. To repeat a point that I have made in response to several interventions, although the reductions go right across the spectrum of employers' contributions, they have been weighted deliberately in favour of small employers who are more likely to have employees on the lower contribution rates. For employees earning up to £185 a week, the proposed reduction in the employers' contribution is 0·4 per cent. against 0·05 per cent. where the employee earns above that sum.

If the small employer suffers average sickness levels in his work force, the contribution reductions will more than offset the reduced SSP reimbursement rate. I gave a number of examples when we last debated the Bill in this House, as did my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State in another place. However, in the light of this afternoon's discussion, it may be helpful for me to give one or two further examples.

If an employer has five employees all earning £170 a week and one of those employees is away for a total of three weeks in the year, which is the average incidence of sickness, there will be a net gain to the employer of £94·39. That assumes not only the 80 per cent. reimbursement, but that the employer tops up the difference between the lower and higher rate of statutory sick pay under an occupational sick pay scheme. That will not be true in all cases and, where it is not, the gain to the employer will be larger. Even on the least good basis that I can take, there will be a gain of almost £100 a year to the employer. Even if the employee is away for six weeks in the year—that is, twice the average incidence of sickness—there would still, on the relatively unfavourable basis from my point of view, be a modest gain of £11·98.

If the employer had 10 employees in that earnings range and experienced the same incidence of sickness, the savings would be £188·78 and £23·96 respectively, while an employer with 20 employees all earning £170 would gain £377·56 with four employees sick for three weeks, and just under £48 if the four were away for six weeks.

I hope that I have said enough, because, clearly, those examples can be multiplied almost indefinitely, to indicate that, in a number of perfectly reasonable representative cases, even allowing for above-average sickness, a large number of employees and employers would gain from my proposals taken as a package, although not, of course, if we look only at the proposals in the Bill, but they are integral with the reductions in national insurance contributions. It is very important that I should underline that point with all the emphasis at my command.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): My right hon. Friend will know that I have made representations to him about all the extra money that he has already announced. I support his long battles with the Treasury, although I am not sure whether I agree with this one. However, will my right hon. Friend reassure the House and many other people that the scheme will not discriminate against those who have more sickness than others? There are bound to be people in work who, for whatever reason, need more time off because of their illnesses. There is great worry that they will be discriminated against by a company that decides that it cannot afford to take them on because they would be off work more often than an average employee.

Mr. Newton: I shall refer later to the main thrust of what my hon. Friend says because it is related to the amendments. Her general point has been raised on several occasions. It was a main argument for not opting for a statutory sick pay scheme in the first place. There has been no evidence of which I am aware that the introduction of statutory sick pay, or any of the changes that have been made in it, have had the effect that my hon. Friend fears, often relating to disabled people in particular. Indeed, a recent survey suggests that disabled people in general have less sickness than many other people in the population. There is no need for employers to have that anxiety. There is no evidence that that anxiety has had a significant effect.

Obviously, there are difficulties for disabled people in gaining employment. Those difficulties need to be tackled in other more specific and direct ways. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People has some responsibility, and my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Employment have a wide variety of schemes. I am sure that the effect of those is much more significant than anything contained in the proposals.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Newton: In one of the increasingly numerous intervals in which I have been sitting rather than standing, I have gathered that there is some concern about the little time that will be left for other hon. Members to take part in the debate. In view of the extent to which I have given way, it would be sensible for me to make some progress.

I have just given some examples of small firms——

Ms. Short: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) or her hon. Friend the Member for

Oldham, West will no doubt have an opportunity to make a substantial speech. It would be sensible now for me to make progress.

Ms. Short: The right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House.

Mr. Newton: I knew that it would be a mistake to give way to the hon. Lady. The trouble is that, when one does not give way to the hon. Lady, she simply falls back on interventions from a sedentary position.

Ms. Short: It is an important point.

5.15 pm

Mr. Newton: I have acknowledged persistently and repeatedly that there is a balance of £100 million—a tiny fraction though that is—of labour costs as a whole and that, therefore, not everybody can be gainers. However, the points of concern that have been mentioned by hon. Members and that have come in profusion from other quarters as well are being addressed in particular to the position of small businesses. *[Interruption.]* I cannot say for all small businesses, although we certainly hope to make sure that it will be virtually all small businesses. On any reasonable assessment of what they will be required to pay in SSP and what they will gain in reduced national insurance contributions, taken with the safeguard to which I am about to refer, very large numbers of small businesses are likely to be gainers from the proposals, and not losers. That is clear whichever way one looks at the statistics.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Newton: In fairness to Scotland, I shall give way.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Secretary of State give a statistical analysis of the number of gainers and losers? That point is vital, particularly in rural communities such as my own, where we are dependent upon small businesses to retain local work forces.

Mr. Newton: Each intervention now demonstrates that it would be more sensible if I got on with my speech.

The concession that the Government are proposing, which is contained in the admittedly rather complicated amendments, is estimated to cover 700,000 employers. That is more than half the employers who submit national insurance returns to us. Those 700,000—a very large number of small employers, because the definition that we chose is generous—will have not merely the regular advantages of the national insurance contributions set against an average expectation of having to pay some SSP; they will have the safeguard that, if any employee is sick for more than six weeks, they will go back to 100 per cent. reimbursement. In those cases, there is a strict limit to the amount of extra SSP that they can be expected to pay in respect of any employee. I hope that that will reassure the hon. Lady for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). The measure is specifically designed as a safeguard for the employer who experiences an above-average record of sickness in a member of his work force. I must try to curtail my speech.

We acknowledge that the operation of averages is easier to apply the larger the firm is. It is precisely for that reason that we have brought forward the amendments directed to the position of small firms in the way that I have described. Our efforts have been concentrated on designing a scheme that will help small employers whose experience departs from the average, and that is the basis on which we seek support for the concession that is contained in the amendments.

Different approaches to the problem have been urged on us. Originally, in another place we put forward an amendment in broad terms that would have allowed us scope for different ways of defining who was to count as a small employer for this purpose and different ways of seeking to cope with above-average sickness. However, their Lordships expressed a clear preference for one particular way of doing that, and it is that method of achieving that, rather than the exact details of what was passed in another place, that I am recommending to the House.

As is self-evident, the amendments are complicated. I shall do my best to pick my way through the key provisions and explain them as carefully as I can.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Without giving way.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to be urged in that respect by my hon. Friend, as he has been known to intervene on Secretaries of States' speeches on earlier occasions. I shall take that remark as a self-denying ordinance, for the time being at least.

The first key issue is how we define a small employer. The most obvious way is by the number of employees—five, 10 or 20. However, that method is open to some obvious difficulties. For example, it does not cope with the problem of an employer who has a fluctuating work force, and there are several other difficulties on which I shall not elaborate to the House. We concluded that it would be fairer and simpler to define a small employer by reference to his contribution payments in the preceding tax year. That focuses the definition of his actual wage bill. I am glad to say that, on a matter which has not been free from controversy, that approach to defining a small employer seems to have met with universal agreement.

In practice the method would work as follows. All employers are already required, within 14 days of the end of the tax year, to complete a return to the Inland Revenue giving the total tax and national insurance contributions during that year. So employers should have the information readily available. If the total contributions are within a specified figure, the employer will qualify as a small employer during the whole of the succeeding year. Our original proposal and our amendment set the level at £15,000 of national insurance contributions in a year. That corresponds precisely with what the other place wished.

It will make things clearer to people and enable them to judge the meaning of the definition if I say a word about the scale and size of firms which will come within it. I have already said in response to the hon. Member for Moray that we estimate that some 700,000 employers will potentially be eligible, ranging from an employer with four employees who all are on the upper earnings limit of £350 a week—fairly well paid people—to an admittedly unlikely set-up at the opposite end of the spectrum of 90 employees all on the lower earnings limit of £46 a week. The definition would cover both a large firm of low-paid people and a smaller firm of rather better paid people. It is a much more satisfactory definition than the alternative of counting heads.

To give a few other examples, the definition would cover a firm of 22 employees all earning £100 a week or of

[Mr. Newton]

12 employees all earning £150 a week. As I said, we believe that that is a flexible system. I am sure that it is the right way to proceed. There is common agreement on that in both this House and another place.

Another point which we have accepted is contained in our amendments. It is that the concession and safeguard to employers defined on that general basis should be related to the number of weeks for which an individual has been sick. At various stages in another place there was considerable argument about whether it was better to go for a relatively simple and straightforward approach or one that rested on an aggregated amount of SSP paid in a particular period.

The Government originally hoped to consult on which method industry would prefer but, in the event, another place made it clear that it preferred a solution based on the number of weeks. We thought it right to accept that. However, its proposal was rather complicated. It suggested that one tranche of employers should have 100 per cent. reimbursement throughout, another should receive 100 per cent. reimbursement after three weeks and another 100 per cent. reimbursement after six weeks. We believe that it is right to go for a simpler system and that a proposal which secured 100 per cent. reimbursement for employers of any size went rather too far in view of the contribution reductions to which I have referred. Therefore, we tabled amendments which go beyond our original intention, which was a threshold of eight weeks, to the significantly more generous basis of six weeks, which, as I said, will apply to individual employees and will affect about 700,000 employers. We believe that that is about the right level at which to pitch the measure.

To return to my example of an employer with five employees earning £170 a week who had one employee away for six weeks, the employer would have a total extra cost of £164·82 in SSP but his saving in national insurance contributions over his work force as a whole would be £176·80. So he would still be almost £12 to the good. He would begin to go into deficit if the SSP lasted for more than six weeks. That is when the Government propose that the small employers' relief and a return to 100 per cent. reimbursement should apply to prevent him from going into deficit.

I have necessarily spent some little time on the proposals, not only as a result of interventions but because I thought it right to explain the proposals as fully as possible. I shall explain as briefly as possible some of the other points covered by the Government amendments.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Newton: It would be more sensible if the hon. Gentleman allowed me to get on. I understand that he will make his own speech afterwards.

Our amendments to subsection (1B) of Lords amendment No. 7 set out the formula for determining whether a small employer is entitled to small employers' relief. There is an algebraic formula, which is not as complicated as it might appear. It ensures that all days of SSP, including odd days, count in the calculation. Another improvement on the Lords amendments is that by relating the provision to periods of incapacity for work, linked spells—spells of SSP not separated by more than eight weeks—can be taken into account in calculating the six weeks. That is a refinement which is not in the Lords amendments. Indeed, it is a further useful safeguard for businesses which experience above-average sickness in an employee.

Subsection (1C) of our amendment (a) to Lords amendment No.7 retains for possible but not certain use in future some of the flexibility which we originally sought to gain. Whether it is appropriate to use it will depend on events. We shall take very much into account early experience of our proposals. We have maintained, at the cost of some additional complexity in drafting our amendments, the scope to adopt a different approach, what I would call an aggregation, rather than an individual employee approach, if that seems the sensible course. Several noble Lords in another place, including my noble Friend Lord Jenkin, attached particular importance to such an approach and we were anxious to retain the flexibility to adopt it if it seemed sensible.

Subsection (1D) contains the power which enables regulations to define a small employer on the basis of contribution payments. The power is sufficiently flexible to allow us to define the prescribed period to which the contribution threshold relates to a period other than the preceding tax year. That makes provision for the new employer who does not have a full year's national insurance record on which he can be judged.

The only other significant point which must be made is that subsection (1E) meets a point pressed on us fairly hard in another place by setting into the primary legislation the scope for reviewing the £[illegible],000 contribution threshold. The subsection requires the Secretary of State to consider each year whether the threshold should be increased in the light of various points referred to in the amendment.

I have said as much as I need to say about the drafting of the amendment, which represents a significant additional safeguard for small businesses which experience above-average sickness. Such employers would be likely —I cannot say certain—to be gainers from the basic structure of our proposals.

Before I conclude, I should make a few remarks about Lords amendment No. 5.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): How much will the proposals for large employers such as Cleveland county council affect the community charge? Any extra cost will have to be passed on by large employers but employers such as councils do not have customers to whom they can go, only community charge payers.

Mr. Newton: I have necessarily used illustrative examples. Clearly it is not possible for me to work out, certainly not on my feet, the precise affect on Cleveland county council or any other employer, without any knowledge of the mix of its employees and the wages paid to them. However, such employers will benefit from the reduction in national insurance contributions, which applies at every level of earnings and to employers of all sizes.

5.30 pm

Lords Amendment No. 5 removes from the Bill scope for making further changes in the reimbursement rate by means of secondary rather than primary legislation. Without by any means accepting everything that was said on that matter in another place—perhaps it has been overlooked that there is power under secondary legislation to raise employers' national insurance contributions by no

less than about £1 billion—I readily accept that it was a point of concern to the business community which, despite what I said on Second Reading, continued to express fears lest there was some settled plan for going further than what was contained in the Bill.

I am happy to advise the House in that respect to agree with the Lords in the amendment so that were any change to be contemplated at any future stage it would be necessary to bring primary legislation before the House, rather than to act on the basis of secondary legislation.

I appreciate that I have delayed the House for some time, I hope for reasons which the House will understand. In everything that I have said is implied the view, which I hold strongly, that what we have proposed strikes a fair and reasonable balance—a new and slightly adjusted balance—in the provision for short-term sickness in circumstances where the small shift that it proposes makes an important contribution to progress on other social security objectives which are widely supported.

My view that that is a fair and reasonable balance, in the context of social security spending as a whole, is greatly strengthened by the additional safeguard that we have built in for small businesses, responding to representations made by many of my hon. Friends and others, and I seek the support of the House for those changes, modified as they have been, as a whole.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I must advise the House that the amendment and Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 7 involve privilege.

Mr. Meacher: It is an unhappy day for parliamentary democracy when the Government impose a heavy Whip, as we are led to believe, to try to marshal their full majority over amendments made in another place which merely soften, but do not in any way strike out, what must be one of the most unpopular Bills in modern times. But I am encouraged by the number of Conservative Members present for the debate, which I hope will be a genuine and open debate on the issues involved.

It is not unfair to say that the Bill does not have a friend anywhere, except the Treasury and the occupants of the Government Front Bench. It is comprehensively repudiated by the CBI, the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, the Engineering Employers Federation, the Building Employers Federation and by any and every small business and organisation one cares to name, as well as by the TUC, the trade unions and the voluntary sector.

Indeed, the business community and all major business representative groups are united—I cannot recall when this has previously been the case—in still demanding that the Government withdraw the whole Bill, even after the damage limitation achieved in another place.

Mr. Holt: Is the hon. Gentleman also aware that the Institute of Personnel Management is opposed to this legislation, being the practitioners who would have to put it into practice?

Mr. Meacher: I am glad to accept the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, which I hope was heard by the Minister. It adds to my point that the right hon. Gentleman would find it impossible to find any reputable body outside which favours the Bill. I cannot recall a time when I was able to say that to the Government.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Meacher: No, because it is a side issue and I am anxious to make progress with my speech.

The Minister's palpable embarrassment at defending the indefensible was exposed in his Third Reading speech, which must have been the shortest I have witnessed in 20 years in Parliament. It occupied a mere five lines in *Hansard*, the right hon. Gentleman simply saying that he might decide to say something later, which in the event he did not. In view of that obvious and manifest embarrassment, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman does not come to our proceedings today with a closed mind and that he will not treat Parliament with the contempt that a heavy Whip might suggest, for we are faced with serious issues that must be debated seriously.

The central issue today is whether the Lords amendment to make the whole new Government package completely cost neutral should be allowed to stand. The original Bill was, as the Minister said, intended to cut the reimbursement of SSP from 100 to 80 per cent. It also removed the 7 per cent. additional handling charge which employers could claim for administrative cost.

That would have cost employers about £250 million in 1991-92. That was roughly balanced—it was fair for the Secretary of State to make the point—by reductions in employers' national insurance contribution rates which would have saved them about £250 million a year. But those changes were heavily slanted in favour of employers paying below average wages, and they are not necessarily small employers.

But the Government have offered no compensation to employers for the increased cost that they will have to bear as a result of the changes in SSP rates announced in the right hon. Gentleman's annual benefit uprating statement. Because of the rise in the earnings threshold, from £125 to £185, which determines entitlement to the higher rate of SSP, about three million workers will lose eligibility, of whom about 600,000 who might be expected to claim this year will lose about £9 a week.

In many cases, employers would have to make up the shortfall and their costs would rise by as much as £100 million, according to the Government's figures. It was that shortfall which the Lords amendment was designed to rectify. It would increase the employers' reimbursement rate to 91 per cent. That percentage is fine tuned to increase the amount reimbursed to employers by £99 million, which is virtually exactly the loss to employers from the change in the SSP threshold. So the overall effect of the amendment is cost neutral in the Government's calculations.

Three central questions are at issue today; first, why are the Government resisting the amendment and going to such lengths to overturn it; secondly, why are they so determined, in the face of a triple rejection in another place and when the business community is screaming for the withdrawal of the Bill, to push ahead with a measure that is cost neutral in its basic structure; and, thirdly, why are they being so excessively mean and niggardly, as I shall show, towards small employers and going out of their way to deny them the smallest relief already agreed in another place?

The answers to those questions will reveal much about the Government's intentions. Why are they refusing to accept an overall cost neutral package? The answer seems

[Mr. Meacher]

clear. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman virtually said as much today. He is having to make cuts in the package to recompense the Treasury for the minor concessions that he has already obtained from the Treasury on tick, in particular for the increase in child benefit.

So the first reason to oppose the Government today is that that part of the Secretary of State's argument is wholly objectionable. It is not right to try to justify cuts in provision for one vulnerable group on the ground that more is being spent on another. A separate point is that the argument is also tantamount to the state advocating its well-established responsibility to protect the welfare of employees during periods of sickness.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman loves to present himself to the House as the scourge of the employing classes. Why is he not prepared to accept the proposition that employers have a responsibility to their employees when they are sick? There is nothing wrong with requiring them to make a modest contribution to the care of sick employees. The hon. Gentleman does not answer that question because the point he makes is completely bogus.

Mr. Meacher: I am happy to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. I agree that employers have a responsibility towards their employees when they are sick. The problem is that the survey from which the Government like to quote on the highly spurious 91 per cent. figure shows that only 44 per cent. of private sector employers provide occupational sick pay for their employees. For small firms, the figure is only about half that. That is why the state still has a clear responsibility, and it is foolish of the hon. Gentleman not to recognise that.

It is not as though the extra £1 for the first child is much of an increase after a four-year freeze. The Secretary of State tried to outline the great improvements that the Government are making and said that, of course, employers must bear some of the cost. However, an increase of £1 a week for only the first child after a four-year freeze, when the shortfall is £2·30 a week, does not amount to much. The Secretary of State needed to make some improvement as a figleaf before the forthcoming election, but the Treasury would not fund it and forced the right hon. Gentleman to find the money by making cuts elsewhere. That is why the Government are so adamant that they will not accept the 91 per cent. overall cost-neutral compromise and insist on returning to their original 80 per cent.

I think it was the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller), who is otherwise engaged at the moment, who hit the nail on the head: how can the Government justify asking small employers to subsidise child benefit? That was an accurate observation. The Treasury's fingerprints are all over the Bill, but nowhere more clearly than in overturning the 91 per cent. proposal made by Lord Mottistone, a Tory peer in another place.

Why are the Government so determined to press ahead with the main structure of the Bill when there is no net gain to the Exchequer—any savings on the Consolidated Fund are cancelled out by reduced income from national insurance contributions—and when all the business organisations demand that, in the light of the defeats inflicted in another place, the Bill should be withdrawn to allow for the consultations that should have taken place when the Bill was first drafted?

Mr. Newton: I shall try not to intervene too much, but there are echoes in the hon. Gentleman's speech of an earlier exchange that we had. Will the hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that, when he has to put up employers' national insurance contributions to fund his expensive promises, he will yield to the blandishments of employers should they protest about what he is doing and try to stop it?

Mr. Meacher: We have no intention of increasing employers' national insurance rate contributions, so the problem does not arise. As the Secretary of State is so extremely keen to press the point, we have said that we believe that there should be improvements for the pensioners, who have had such a lousy past decade, and in child benefit, which would be financed by removing the upper threshold of national insurance contributions, so that the rich, who have had such a bumper decade, would contribute a bit to help those at the bottom of the pile.

Before I was led aside by that intervention, I was about to give a telling quote from a document from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, the Association of Independent Businesses, the Confederation of British Industry, the Forum of Private Business, the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors, the National Chamber of Trade, the National Farmers Union and the Union of Independent Companies. Apparently, the Institute of Personnel Management is not represented, but it was probably not told about it and would have wanted to put its name to it. The document states:

> "We are unanimously agreed that, despite the important amendments incorporated during the House of Lords debates, the best course would be for the Government to withdraw the Bill and maintain existing arrangements for the present . . . That would allow full discussion before any major changes in this area are introduced."

It could not be any clearer than that, so why is the Secretary of State digging in his heels? The answer is clear. The real purpose behind the wretched little Bill is gradually to transfer the whole of the cost of paying SSP to the employer. In effect, it will privatise the payment of sickness benefit. By transferring 20 per cent. of the cost, the Government save, on their own figures, £250 million and by transferring the rest the Government have their eyes on a further £1 billion. That is the real aim, which is why the Government are determined to stuff the Bill down the employers' throats come what may.

5.45 pm

However, that is not the end of the story. I shall return to the perceptive intervention of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir. R. McCrindle): the transfer of statutory sick pay could well set a precedent for statutory maternity pay, giving a further saving of £270 million, and for industrial injury compensation, when the savings might be more than £500 million. Let no one be unaware of the fact that we are setting that precedent today. The bottom line is that the Bill will dismantle the welfare state. That is why we, and I suspect the great majority of people in this country, strongly object to it. The Bill also involves shifting huge costs of up to, over future years, as much as £2 billion on to employers. That is why they object to it so strongly.

It would have made it much easier for the Government if they could have overturned the Lords amendment that requires that any further changes in the percentage of reimbursement should be through primary, not secondary, legislation. That is not what the Government wanted or intended. In the original Bill, the Government proposed that any change would require only a negative resolution of the House, not even an affirmative resolution. They wanted changes to be carried out quietly behind closed doors, if possible without embarrassing discussion in the open. However, in accepting the amendment adopting the primary legislation requirement, moved and passed in another place—I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State did so—the Government display no real change of heart. If they had overturned the amendment, the nakedness of their purpose—gradually reducing the percentage reimbursement towards zero—would have been too transparent, and so they did not.

The Government, quite remarkably, refused to accept even the small concession on behalf of small employers that was moved and passed in another place. That was extraordinary, given the litany of damning screams from the Government's corporate supporters. I am sure that other hon. Members will have heard some of the complaints. The Confederation of British Industry said:

"No one wants the Bill, but fear of its impact is widespread.

The Government's tabled response does not meet the case. The best course would be withdrawal of the Bill."

The Forum of Private Business said:

"The timing of the SSP Bill could hardly be worse for the small business community because of the current recession. The Government clearly does not understand small businesses—or does not care."

—*[Interruption.]* I am simply quoting the words of the Forum of Private Business. It goes on:

"The Bill was rushed through the House of Commons at breakneck speed allowing insufficient time for small business groups to put forward positive solutions. As members of the DSS Employers Panel and the Contributions Unit, Specialist Group, the Forum of Private Business is aggrieved that it was not consulted. The proposals in the SSP bill fly in the face of the aims of the Deregulation Unit, a Government body which seeks to simplify rules and regulations affecting small firms."

The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses says:

"The provisions will add substantially to the costs of some businesses, amongst them many small businesses, and do so at the worst possible time, when they are coping with a deep recession."

The Association of British Chambers of Commerce says:

"This is one further burden which could push many struggling businesses into closure, supposedly in a period of deregulation when the private sector is expected to play a more prominent role."

The West Yorkshire Council of the National Chamber of Trade says:

"It would place intolerable burden upon employers at a time of high interest rates, the impact of the uniform business rate and escalating high street rents. This would be a deathblow to many local small businesses and a sharp reduction in employment, also discouraging the employment of disabled and those suffering repetitive sickness."

None of those organisations is known as having crypto-leftist sympathies. But, despite all that, the right hon. Gentleman is still not prepared to accept the modest concessions for small employers agreed in another place.

It is important to be clear just how niggardly the Government are being. When the Bill was first before the House the Government offered no concessions to small employers; but when the business organisations, beginning to alert their members, had had enough time to stir up some palaver in another place—I am glad that they did—the Government jumped in with a concession which they hoped would quieten their Lordships. It did not.

The Government proposed a small employers' exemption after eight weeks of sickness where the annual aggregate of national insurance contributions in 1991 was less than £15,000, as the right hon. Gentleman stated. It was too little too late, and it was rejected out of hand—not surprisingly, since the number of sickness spells that exceed eight weeks is extremely small. The right hon. Gentleman did not tell us the exact number. I am not even sure that he knows, but it is certainly extremely small.

In other words, the Government were trying to buy off the Opposition with a concession which, on the best evidence given to me, was worth a paltry £1 million to £2 million. It was rejected, as it deserved to be, and instead the triple concession was passed—exemption after six weeks' sickness where contributions are under £15,000, after three weeks where contributions are under £10,000 and exemption immediately where contributions are under £5,000. It is important to realise how extremely modest that exemption package is.

National insurance contributions of less than £15,000 imply—the right hon. Gentleman had the grace to admit this—a firm with only five employees where those employees are on national average earnings. The cost of the concession, according to my best estimates, would be only about £15 million. That would still leave an overall gain from the Bill of £85 million to the Exchequer. Despite the fact that that would clearly focus help at the point where the need was greatest for small employers, would obviate administrative complexities, for which the Government are always arguing in small businesses, the Government are trying to overturn it.

In drafting prose in Government amendment (a)—algebra or otherwise, I found it some of the most impenetrable that I have ever had to wade through—the Government are now seeking to knock out the two lower thresholds: exemption after three weeks where contributions are under £10,000, and immediate exemption where contributions are under £5,000. I make it clear that in the latter case the companies that will lose the concession already granted in another place if it is overturned tonight will be overwhelmingly those employing one or two persons only—unquestionably those who have the greatest need; the companies that surely cry out for full exemption.

The sole concession that the right hon. Gentleman is now prepared to contemplate is confined to cases where sickness exceeds six weeks, which is not quite as few as where it exceeds eight weeks but it is still unusual, and where the total cost to the Exchequer is, I believe, a miserly £5 million. That is what the right hon. Gentleman is presenting to the House as a generous concession which he hopes the House will back.

I hope that Conservative Members who, perhaps justly, like to see themselves as the champions of business, particularly small business, will ask themselves tonight whether that is the action of a Government devoted to enterprise or the action of a Government who are cheese-paring and over-concerned with public expenditure cuts in the face of all common sense and reasonableness.

The effect of the Government's obstinacy will be felt most in small companies, but it will be spread across the

whole of industry. The Building Employers Confederation, which embraces, as the House will know, many large and small firms, said:

"The industry has an average manual wage of £260 per week."

I make no apology for giving the figures because the right hon. Gentleman gave many figures. It goes on:

"For an employee on average wages of £260 per week the reduction in employers' National Insurance Contributions will be £6·24 for the year for one employee. It can be seen from this figure that only if such a worker qualifies for Statutory Sick Pay for less than three days a year will his employer be 'a winner' or break even under the legislation. In an industry where much of the work is done in all weathers and is very physically demanding this level of sick leave is unlikely to be met in any company, large or small. The industry contains a large sector of firms employing less than twenty men, where at break even levels such as illustrated, the prolonged sickness of only one or two individuals could result in a heavy deficit under the scheme."

In the light of that and so many other representations that I and I am sure many other hon. Members have received, it is difficult to see how Conservative Members can support the Government tonight when the voice from industry and commerce is unanimously condemnatory.

Many have been put off the Bill by its assumed technicality and by the speed with which the Government pushed it through the House in order to avoid debate. But now that it has returned to the House, the issues are plain. They are not technical; they are political. They concern the state's responsibilities to employees who are sick, the right of employers not to be saddled, at extreme cost, with obligations that are not their function, and the need for the smallest businesses to be properly protected from unnecessary administrative burdens.

For those reasons, I call on hon. Members on both sides of the House, if the Government will not withdraw the Bill as they should, at least to preserve and build on the important amendments moved and passed in another place.

Mr. Nicholls: I declare at the outset my interests in the Federation of Associations of Specialists and Sub-contractors and in the Hill and Smith Group.

One of the curiosities about speaking in the House is that after a period of time the coinage of hyperbole becomes completely devalued. I make that point because during the past seven years it has been my unhappy lot to hear numerous speeches made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). I have listened to him from the Back Benches and I have debated with him from the Front Bench and on every occasion when I have debated with him for any length of time he has shown a complete hatred—I use the word deliberately—of what he regards as the employer classes. He has never had a good word to say about them. The hon. Gentleman's view of the relationship between employees and employers——

6 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I suppose that the hon. Gentleman will claim that we have a classless society.

Mr. Nicholls: —is primitive, even by the standards of those who are heckling on the hon. Gentleman's behalf. For years, we have listened to a torrent of bilious abuse about the employing classes from the hon. Member for Oldham, West. Suddenly, the piranha has turned vegetarian, and we witness the unique spectacle of the hon. Gentleman becoming the bosses' nark—when he should be attempting to make some proper criticism of the Bill.

Did the hon. Gentleman make any real contribution or give the House the benefit of his intellectual thought? Mercifully not, but he retrieved from his wastepaper basket all the letters from employers' organisations that he should have read over the years, and quoted them to the House. The hon. Gentleman has undergone a transformation. He has joined the forces of light from the forces of darkness, and we are presented with the true champion of the employer classes. We see in the hon. Member for Oldham, West the man who claims to be the real representative of the employer classes and the one who will safeguard their interests. Who is the friend of the employers? It is the hon. Member for Oldham, West. Seldom have we been treated to a more ludicrous spectacle than seeing employers' rights championed in that way.

I will treat the hon. Gentleman's contribution with greater kindness and consideration than it deserves, and ask why it is that employers' organisations have expressed their opposition to the Bill. I have a number of advantages over the hon. Member for Oldham, West. I have actual knowledge of the subject. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I run a small business and employ people, and must face the prospect and pressure of making a living at a time when there is a recession. As an employer myself, I do not take kindly to the proposition that I should pay out any more money, in any circumstances. My driving ethos is to gather in money, rather than to spend it. It is hardly surprising that employers' organisations should have written to their Members of Parliament, saying, "Here is a measure that will require us to pay more. We are not in favour of it." One could hardly expect them to be otherwise.

In a curious way, the Bill does nothing more than formalise the practice that many employers already follow. If the claim that there is no real connection between an employer and his employees—that the employee is just a tool to be used, and that if he falls sick he should be made a burden on the state—was ever true, it is certainly not true today. It is ridiculous to argue that an employer has no interest in a valued employee once he falls sick. In this day and age, it is equally ridiculous to expect the state to do everything, and that responsibility should be taken from others.

An editorial in *The Times* today makes the same point. Given the voluminous quotations used by the hon. Member for Oldham, West, it is surprising that he did not refer to that article as well. It states that the Government's arguments are powerful:

"Statutory sick pay is fast becoming an anachronism. Nine out of ten employees are now covered by company schemes, most of them more generous than the state's. That is to be encouraged. And for the state to bear the whole cost of sickness creates the wrong incentive . . . With 30 times more days lost through sickness than through strikes, sickness management is vital to industrial efficiency. Managers should pay at least part of the cost from their pockets."

That point was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller).

Mr. Battle: Will the hon. Gentleman check the figure given in *The Times*? Is it not incorrect? Nine out of ten employees are not covered by company schemes, as that article suggests. If the hon. Gentleman will refer to the Library or to the Secretary of State, he will be informed of the true figure.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman's point is not only bogus but boring.

Mr. Battle: Why does not the hon. Gentleman try to make an argument instead of hurling abuse?

Mr. Nicholls: I admit that my experience of socialists is that, having asked a question, they do not require an answer. However, the conventions of the House are such that, whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not, he will get an answer.

I do not intend to turn this into a Second Reading debate, repeat all the figures that were given then, and illustrate the various ways in which they can be presented. One must inevitably do the best that one can with the figures available. If that is the best intervention that the hon. Gentleman can make in response to the arguments made today and in *The Times* editorial, it does not say much for the quality of his arguments.

The Bill does nothing more than acknowledge common existing practice. Employers already take an interest in employees who fall sick and maintain contact with them. However, I concede that business organisations feared that the Government had got it wrong, especially in respect of small businesses.

On Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out that the measure will produce gains for some. Perhaps organisations that did not understand the Bill's detailed provisions at the time of its Second Reading last November will now be reassured. If one concern deserved to be ventilated in another place, it was the effect that the Bill might—and I emphasise the word "might"—have on small businesses. My right hon. Friend has now said that, even if the Government do not concede the arguments presented in the Lords, they concede the extent of the concern that has been expressed. I may say in passing that a more improbable body to claim to be representative of small businesses than the House of Lords would be hard to find—other than the parliamentary Labour party.

In the overall context of social security spending of £63 billion a year, the Bill is a justifiable measure. One can understand the concerns expressed by small businesses, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has gone a long way to allay them.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) always tries to be nasty—[HON. MEMBERS: "And he succeeds."]—which should further his career. I intervene briefly because I have been asked by a representative of small firms in my constituency to raise certain issues in the debate. I have a question for the Secretary of State, who always knows the details of his legislation. I presume that the purpose of the original Bill was to save money, either for the Department or the Treasury. If so, what savings remain to be achieved after the changes that the right hon. Gentleman announced? There must be some.

I declare an interest as the chairman of a small firm, from which I have never made any money and never will. I take nothing from it. It receives no grants from any source and nothing extra from the bank. It stands on its own feet. That is also at the back of my mind.

The Secretary of State referred to the growth in occupational pensions and said that it has not been so pronounced in manual occupations. I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that absenteeism is not so high in small firms as it is in larger companies. Therefore, his argument that absenteeism should be taken into account does not apply nearly so much to small firms.

I was glad that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) warned the Secretary of State about the danger of using averages, which can affect the perspective. When the Secretary of State called them in aid, he failed to take into account the problems of very small firms.

I promised to raise in the House a matter which was brought to my attention by the branch secretary of the British Decorators Association, Heavy Woollen and Spen Valley branch, Mr. Peter Hanley, who lives in Morley in my constituency. It also worries me because I know that small firms have problems at the moment. Goodness knows, problems are affecting small and large firms in the building industry, including the small firm of which I am chairman. One problem is that people do not pay their bills and a shortage of income, of whatever degree, causes problems.

Mr. Hanley brought to my notice the fact that the association is

"alarmed at the likely effect on small business employers"—

of the Bill. He said that what the Government are doing is

"a potential death blow to small businesses—particularly in labour intensive . . . industries".

The Government, and not merely the Department of Social Security, should take that into account. When small firms are in trouble they cannot find the smallest amount of money. There is nobody to whom they can turn and banks are not nearly as helpful as they were.

The member firms of the British Decorators Association are small and Mr. Hanley told me that they are

"already reeling under the impact of the rating system plus revaluation, high interest rates and high street rents which are escalating alarmingly in most areas of our constituency."

Will those small firms be worse off as a result of the changes made, taking into account the concessions—if that is the correct description—that the Secretary of State made tonight? Small firms have enough problems without having to face these additional ones.

I have to congratulate the Government. They are hurting large numbers of people with the poll tax—people who would normally vote for them. That is marvellous. Their policy is so right that they continue to hurt the very people who put a cross on a piece of paper. Small employers do not vote Labour in very large numbers and they, too, will be hurt. They are worried, and I hope that the Government will take their worries into account.

The Government are still saving money because of the Bill. If there were no savings they would not have introduced it. The amendments and the new clause do not go far enough. They will save money, but some firms will be worse off and that will be the straw which breaks the camel's back.

By my stage in life I understand taxation, and I agree with my Front-Bench spokesman that taxation has increased in the past 10 years, despite the fact that income tax has come down. I believe that the likes of me should pay 50 per cent., not 40 per cent., in income tax, and that it is right to go to the electorate and say that there should be higher taxation. I believe that because part of the constituency that I represent is a deprived area and every

[Mr. Merlyn Rees]

weekend I realise that it is nonsense for people to say, "Let us cut taxes". More money needs to be spent in some areas, but it needs to be spent wisely.

The Bill will hurt small businesses rather than large numbers of people as the poll tax does. I believe in small businesses and that is why I want to help the firms in my constituency. It will not make a toss of difference at the next election in my constituency, so I am not arguing against the changes for that reason. Small businesses are in trouble and the Government are forgetting it.

Mr. Speller: Our problem is one of trust and perception. I entirely accept everything that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said. He has our trust because we have always perceived him to be a good and honourable man. However, the outcry over the relatively small changes in the Bill has also changed perceptions of Government integrity and the Treasury's integrity in influencing the Government. This is not a minor matter. The integrity of business depends upon trust.

Employers have to pay national insurance—there is no argument about that—but have always expected that they would get 100 per cent. reimbursement, having paid the premium. When one takes out an insurance policy, it is understandable, if one pays a lower premium, to have to pay the first 20 per cent. of the claim.

One of my hon Friends pointed out that before employers had to pay national insurance contributions they could insure privately and get wonderful cover for their staff. However, the essence of the matter is that compulsion is involved and that the House is doing the compelling, not the other place, where they made significant changes to the Bill.

At the moment, I am minded to vote against the Government simply because of the question of integrity. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State always makes the best case that he can, no matter how bad the hand that he is playing. The measure will not bankrupt Marks and Spencer and Cleveland council, which have both been mentioned, but for the farmers and small employers in my constituency it might be yet another of those last straws which do not quite break the camel's back but are making the camel a little bowed.

The Secretary of State tells us—I know that he means and believes it—that there is some sort of average. One can always add figures together, divide them by a number of years and get a figure, but there is no average. In some years the shops in which I have an interest are destroyed for a fortnight because all the employees and the management have influenza. In other years it will be because of a three-day cold or lurgie, but there is no such thing as an average in a small business because they do not employ enough people to make an average. We all know which employees work hard and which do not. If employees can take 21 days' sick leave without loss of pay, we all know which employees will take them because they think that it is their entitlement.

6.15 pm

As an employer I would expect to pay my premium for statutory sick pay and to get my reward if I had to call upon it. I do not hope to cash it in, to be sick, or for any of my staff to be sick, but employers are paying 100 per cent. for a 100 per cent. return.

This is not the time to impose even the smallest burden. I know that the figures are pretty good—0·04 per cent., which is negligible. However, it is not negligible if one has 10 staff to worry about.

When my right hon. Friend sums up, will he take a hard look at these so-called averages and bear in mind the fact that, although people throughout the country do not enjoy our various forms of taxation, they think that this form of taxation is especially mean. It is imposed upon those who cannot answer back. One cannot cancel the policy and find another insurance company. One is stuck with it and people like me do not like it.

Mr. Wallace: Many hon. Members respect the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller), who made some very pertinent comments and said that his vote will be following his voice. As he said, we cannot average figures out throughout the country and somehow find an equilibrium for the Secretary of State's proposals.

When listening to the Secretary of State earlier this evening hon. Members had the right to be somewhat perplexed about what exactly he was telling the House. He certainly presented the proposals as a package with, on the one hand, national insurance contribution reductions and, on the other, an added imposition upon employers, and he suggested that they would balance each other out. However, he also said that there would be a net bonus of £100 million which would be used to help poorer pensioners and for community care—no hon. Member would quibble with that. Yet if £100 million is to be released as a result of this package, clearly there will be some losers. The pertinent question is, if small businesses are to be the losers, should they bear that burden? No one argues with the worthiness of the cause, but should small businesses have to pay for it?

My party supports Lords amendment No. 3, although we regret the proposed reduction from the present 100 per cent. to 91 per cent. We oppose any reduction.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) mentioned the leader in *The Times* today. On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) did a fairly effective demolition job on the notion that nine out of 10 employees were covered by company sickness schemes. According to *The Times*,

"for the state to bear the whole cost of sickness creates the wrong incentives."

Conservative Members frequently assert that it is not the state's money, but the taxpayer's. We are talking about national insurance contributions made by both employers and employees, and we wanted a rebate.

Back in the early 1980s, the Select Committee on Social Services considered the original proposals. I referred to its findings on Second Reading. Its report states:

"Whilst the reduction in national insurance liability will be approximately proportional to payroll costs, the liability to pay ESSP will be far less evenly spread. Industries, occupations or regions with higher than average rates of sickness will have relatively greater costs under ESSP."

Despite that timely warning some nine or 10 years ago, the Government have presented a scheme that they roundly rejected then and have fallen into the same old trap of trying to pretend that there is a possibility of a trade-off between changes in national insurance contributions and sick pay provisions.

Ms. Short: The Bill was introduced with such speed that the social security advisory committee was unable to report at the time. Is not that another part of the whole dishonourable process?

Mr. Wallace: The problem was not only the speed with which the Bill was introduced, but the speed with which further stages were taken, with Second Reading on a Monday and remaining stages on the Wednesday. That hardly allowed us time to breathe, let alone adopt a considered approach. The other place had time to engage in useful deliberation and consultation and thus was able to consider the Bill much more effectively.

I believe that the Bill will have an uneven impact, affecting small businesses disproportionately—notwithstanding the concessions that have been made. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd. has made some calculations, taking into account both the 80 per cent. rebate provision in the Bill and the changes in employers' national insurance contributions. In 1990-91, if an employee earned £100 a week and his employer paid £7·03 national insurance, with a 100 per cent. SSP rebate—which would amount to £39·25—the 7 per cent. national insurance rebate would amount to £2·75, resulting in the employer's paying a total of £65·03. Following the enactment of the Bill, the employer would pay a total of £71·80—£6·77 per week more per employee, in a small business. That may seem a small amount, but the hon. Member for Devon, North referred to the "last straw". For a company facing a deepening recession, even that sum can mount up when multiplied by a number of weeks and a number of employees.

In the case of an employee earning £125 per week, the added subsidy from employers is estimated at £18·34 per week, while in the case of an employee earning £150 per week the added subsidy amounts to £20·74 per week. When the employee is earning £184·50 per week, the added subsidy is estimated to be £17·97. Those are fairly sizeable sums, which put the "package" referred to so frequently by the Secretary of State into context.

Although we support the amendment, given a 91 per cent. rebate, the balance between what is gained and what is lost is neutral. That is very much the second-best option, the best being no diminution at all.

We are glad to learn that the Government accept Lords amendment No. 5, moved by Lord Russell—in fairly vigorous terms, I understand, with copious references to Henry VIII. His was a very good speech, and I am glad that its persuasive power had its effect on the Government. If they try in future to change the rate and provide for a higher rebate, they must come back to Parliament with primary legislation. That is an important principle, irrespective of the subject matter: many hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that far too much secondary legislation goes through both Houses of Parliament, especially by means of negative resolution.

Further contentious matter is contained in Lords amendment No. 7 and the Government amendment to it. Admittedly, the Government have made an attempt to find some relief for small businesses, but we do not believe that it goes nearly far enough. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) proposed an amendment that he intended to have a similar effect, limiting the impact of the provisions and bringing relief to companies employing fewer than 20 workers. The Government rejected that amendment, but wiser counsels prevailed in another place.

We support the amendment moved successfully in another place by Lord Stanley. According to the figures that I have been given, a total national insurance contribution of less than £15,000 could cover companies employing up to 20 workers, with a taper giving cover of £10,000 for a company employing between five and 10 people and £5,000 for a company employing one or two. The estimates that I have been given differ somewhat from those cited by the hon. Member for Oldham, West; it is the difference between £6 million and £15 million. Either way, it is a small amount compared with the Government's total budget and what they seek to achieve in the Bill.

I ask the Secretary of State to consider the merits of the taper that would allow the smallest businesses—those employing only one or two people—exemption in the event of sickness. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman needs much imagination to understand what it means to such a business to have 50 per cent., or even 100 per cent., of its work force off sick. I am not talking only about the cost with which this provision will land such businesses; I am talking about the cost to the enterprise as a whole of lacking a key employee at a certain time. The taper is designed not just to provide financial relief, but to take account of the set-up in many small businesses where the value of individual employees is even greater than it is in firms employing 100 or 500 people, in which a single absence could probably be covered.

We are sorry that the Government seek to lose the taper. They propose a £15,000 threshold and a period of six weeks. As I said earlier, that period appears to bear no relation to principle; it is twice as long as the average sickness period. Although the Secretary of State suggested that 700,000 businesses would come into that category, it is clear that many fewer stand to benefit.

I echo the view that the best option would be the withdrawal of the Bill. It is a penny-pinching, mean-minded measure that will affect small businesses especially badly at a time of recession and will affect those forming businesses when they, too, face exceptional difficulties. It is, as we said, the last straw for many businesses. It does little to save the Treasury money; it leads to little saving in manpower. Rather, it transfers to the private sector a state function which I believe many hon. Members feel should lie with the state.

We shall support the amendments that were made in the other House, but only as second best to the Government's withdrawing this Bill altogether.

6.30 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I rise to comment, for the purposes of the debate, on Lords amendment No. 3, to praise my right hon. Friend and, I hope, in passing to damn this Bill. I want to praise my right hon. Friend because I would not want him to misunderstand. He can surely tell that there is great affection for him and trust in what he has been doing over a number of years in social security. That is not affected in any way by what I am about to say.

It seemed to me that the burden of my right hon. Friend's case was that he had provided a number of gains of one kind, that these had merit, but that there was a cost in securing those gains and it was not unreasonable to ask

[Mr. Richard Shepherd]

businesses to contribute to that cost. I understand the argument perfectly, and I believe that we are in deeper waters than my simple translation of the position might imply, because there is a point here that goes to the heart of the matter.

I understood that the statutory sick pay scheme was brought about because, the Government said, it was effectively a no cost scheme for businesses. Indeed, that point was emphasised when they made an additional grant of 7 per cent. in a sense for administering the scheme. However, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, times change, and this is what really concerns me. He is looking at a social security budget and within that he is trying to see perhaps a gain here and a recapturing of expenditure there. This measure goes to the heart of small businesses and, indeed, of every business in the country. I wonder what the Department of Trade and Industry has to say on this, or indeed the Department of Employment.

I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller). It is true that in life the success of great enterprises is often a question of sentiment. With people behind one, one can achieve miracles. When one does not have people behind one, that withdrawal of sentiment and faith in institutions, Governments or parties makes it much more difficult to get things to work.

Let me put the argument from the point of view of business. I have watched with regret the rise of inflation. I say no more than that. It has imposed great difficulties on businesses. There have been rapid increases in rent, reflecting an increase in money supply. We have seen the corrective action that has had to be taken, an increase in interest rates. We have seen entry into the exchange rate mechanism, which means that we now predicate our interest rate policy on exchange rates. All these have a direct bearing on both small and large businesses. And at the end of the day, through this measure, we are putting an additional burden on businesses. We are changing the sentiment.

As my right hon. Friend has acknowledged, and as was shown in the debate in another place, we do not know how this falls. We do not know the incidence of those covered by company sick pay schemes. I think that the rubric is that 90 per cent. of companies have some form of sick pay scheme. I should have liked my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) to have taken on board that point because it was he who, in part, stirred me to speak in this debate. I am very glad to note that he obviously affords all the benefits that *The Times* urges all companies to provide.

But life is a transitional matter and we try to achieve what we can as and when we can. The burden of my concern is that we are placing an additional disadvantage on companies. It is not very easy to quantify and in some instances it is probably very small. I accept my right hon. Friend's statement that there might be instances of very small companies benefiting from his amendment. But for some it is a burden of considerable size, and this is where I am very sceptical about Government statistics. They say that £250 million represents only ·075 per cent. of £300 billion. What has that got to do with the price of fish? That is what we used to say in business. It has very little to do with the price of fish. It is a burden that is borne by the businesses.

I cannot blame my right hon. Friend for this imposition. I feel that it is a misjudgment of Government. I think, therefore, that our noble Friends and all those who often support our party instinctively—small business men like myself—would be grateful if the Government took the opportunity to reflect and to withdraw what is an abysmal little measure.

Mr. Battle: On 26 November, when the House debated the principle of the Bill on Second Reading, we were told by the Secretary of State that the proposals in the Bill would be widely welcomed. I think it was the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) who said that employers wanted to accept more responsibility for their lives. What we have learnt today in the debate, as well as in the country at large, and in the debate in the other place, is that that is manifestly not the case.

Markers were put down on Second Reading and in Committee, on 28 November, when the House discussed the Bill, and there were votes on the issue then. It is worth bearing in mind that the Government tried to squeeze this Bill through the House at what we might call the interregnum between the former Prime Minister's resignation and the election of the new Prime Minister. It was the time when there seemed to be almost wall-to-wall coverage by the press and other media of the changes in the Conservative leadership. Therefore, there was very little coverage of what was happening in the House. Only subsequently has the world woken up to the Bill's implications.

Since that time the Bill has gone to the other place, which has overruled the Government's proposals. We are now faced with a Government amendment that is nearly as long as the Bill itself, and the Secretary of State refers to it as safeguards being built in when it is really a late-in-the-day rearguard action against a badly mauled Bill that should be withdrawn because of injury.

In opposing the Bill, the Confederation of British Industry says in its letter that no one wants the Bill and that

> "The Bill has been rushed. Serious concerns only emerged during the last stages."

I would argue that some of those concerns were raised on the Floor of the House, and it is on the record for those who care to reflect on it. We have argued throughout, and we repeat now, that it is the Government's policy in the Bill to reduce the state statutory social security contributions and to push those burdens on to the backs of employers, and ultimately the employees will have to pay the price.

The hon. Member for Teignmouth cited the editorial in *The Times* today. He should not believe all that he reads in every newspaper. This Bill was rooted in a report commissioned by the DHSS, and the Government claimed at the time that the vast majority of workers were covered by private occupational schemes. However, the details in that report show that 44 per cent. of all private sector firms and 55 per cent. of firms with fewer than 10 employees, which effectively accounts for 75 per cent. of firms, have no scheme whatsoever. How does that show that 90 per cent. are covered by private schemes? Even in firms where some occupational scheme exists, coverage is far from universal

because the employees most commonly affected are covered by exclusion clauses; they are working part time in lower grades on low wages, so they are not included.

Effectively, nearly one in two schemes has exclusion clauses relating to the length of service and the hours of work. In other words, 72 per cent. of employees may be affected by those exclusion clauses. So the coverage is extremely limited and even the writer of *The Times* editorial might like to reflect on the true evidence that we ought to be considering instead of creating the impression that there is blanket coverage when there is not.

The Minister said in the past that fears were exaggerated. I remind the House that we were told that fears about the poll tax were exaggerated. There is a very interesting parallel—because what is the figure there? The Government insisted that everybody must pay at least 20 per cent. regardless of ability to pay. It was precisely that clause that landed the Government in the mess with the poll tax that they are now trying to clear up. The same is true of the uniform business rate and the unavailability—for—work test.

The Bill represents a further withdrawal of Government responsibility, significantly now at the worst of all possible times. The recession is manifestly worse. Interest rates are biting and everyone knows it. When the cornerstone store in Leeds—Lewis's—has to put a closed notice on its doors after having negotiated a wage cut of 7·5 per cent., it is clear that the economic policy of this country must be deeply flawed. Firms are beginning to pay the price.

Traditionally, Leeds is the city of small and medium-sized firms. The fact is that 4,500 small and medium-sized firms make up the city's commercial base. The Leeds chamber of commerce and industry wrote to me at the end of last month and said:

"At our recent Council meeting, our members were unanimous in expressing their opposition to the proposals to substantially alter the administrative procedures of Statutory Sick Pay.

We are particularly concerned by the intention to reduce from 100% to 80% the amount by which employers are reimbursed by Government for payments made to sick employees by deduction from remittances of National Insurance Contributions . . . it was agreed that the existing principle behind SSP—that it is a state benefit administered by employers—should not be weakened and that the existing reimbursement of 100% should remain . . . we do not acknowledge that individual employers can expect such a neat balancing act and believe that many businesses will be adversely affected.

One of our members with a large labour force reports that the cost of staff sickness is currently running at the rate of around £1·25 million to £1·5 million per annum. They estimate that the proposal to reduce the current level of reimbursement of employers' expenditure on SSP from 100% to 80% would cost them about £50,000 per annum.

At a time when industry and commerce is under severe financial pressure we feel that it is totally inappropriate to bring forward such legislation".

The letter is signed by the president of the Leeds chamber of commerce and industry. Tragically, he has had to announce 250 job losses in his own textile manufacturing company in the city. The Leeds chamber of commerce and industry knows about the pressures that small and medium-sized firms face. Some firms will have to pay back to the bank 21 per cent. in interest. They may employ only two or three people. Their margins are absolutely tight. Marginal costs can mean jobs lost. I urge the Secretary of State not to paper over the Bill by means of long amendments but to take it away and think again.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I have listened with increasing weariness to the rantings and ravings of Her Majesty's Opposition. Their opposition to this excellent measure seems to be based on the same tired, old and outdated battles on class structure and hatred of employers which makes the linkage with the Confederation of British Industry somewhat suspect. All hon. Members have received a battery of pleas from eminent employer organisations urging us to oppose the Bill. Might we now for a moment or two look at more logical reasons for not responding to the pleas of those organisations?

The point has been made that the Bill was introduced in haste. There is something in that argument. However, we have had a good debate and I suggest that the fact that the Secretary of State has considered the arguments sensitively shows that more time is not needed to debate the Bill and that it could easily be passed this evening.

Secondly, there is the question of timing and the difficulty of implementing such a measure during a recession. Small firms are the most immediately vulnerable during a recession. I received a good proposal from the National Farmers Union, but the proposals made by the Secretary of State in the form of amendments must go far enough to ease worries.

Thirdly, and most important of all——

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Nicholson: As I want to make a short speech, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not giving way.

Thirdly, there is the philosophical question: is it right that the Government should place the burden of responsibility for this modest proportion of statutory sick pay on employers? To that question I say, resoundingly, yes. Henry VIII—that excellent merry monarch—has already been mentioned in the debate. Is it not appropriate to think of employer-employee responsibilities as somewhat akin to marriage? In marriage one takes on one's partner in sickness and in health. That is also true of the partnership in the workplace. We cannot take on an employee and say that we shall take on only part of that employee—that we shall use that man or woman only if he or she is in 100 per cent. health. We take on the whole person—their skills, qualities and weaknesses—and also that person's liability, which all of us share, to fall sick from time to time.

6.45 pm

It is important to the health of British industry that there should be a far closer partnership between employer and employee. Germany is hugely successful. Japan—an even more dominant partner in the coming worldwide pattern of trade—has the closest possible link between employer and employee. I believe that the state makes a very bad third partner—indeed, a very bad mistress which could lead to divorce between employer and employee. By taking away responsibility from the two partners affected by the working partnership—the person in charge and the person who is taken on—the state causes grave difficulties for British industry and weakens the role of management as well as the position of the employee.

Why, therefore, should the state intervene in the first place by making any form of statutory sick pay provision? Why did the House of Commons pass such a measure? The primary role of the state is to set standards on behalf of society, to which society should adhere. The best

employers already run excellent statutory sick pay schemes. However, there are many not-so-good employers. Therefore, the state has to set standards in order to ensure that all employers follow the best possible practice. That must be the primary role of the state. Its role is not to take responsibility off our shoulders, whether we be individual citizens or organisations, or large or tiny firms. The state must set standards for employers.

We have spoken at length about small firms. This is an article of faith to which both sides of the House seem to be firmly pinned, but large and medium-sized companies are just as important to the health of the British economy. The Bill will go a long way towards buttressing the good partnership between employer and employee at all levels of British business. I strongly support the Bill.

Mr. Frank Field: I wish to add one point and, perhaps surprisingly, to move the debate on from the speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson). If the hon. Lady were to suggest that I have joined the class rantings on this side of the House, although it may not further the debate, it may improve my chances in my constituency. That would be none too bad a thing.

My single point is that we are discussing an important and considerable change—a point that has not always been made clear in the speeches that I have heard. I am afraid that I was not here for the first part of the debate, as I wished to attend the meeting with the Polish ambassador. I oppose this change. I am not one of those who traditionally oppose change. It was the Labour party that first proposed the sale of council houses. I believed it to be an important means of spreading wealth in the community. Moreover, I want pension changes to be made that go far beyond those proposed by the Government. I also want those who are building up substantial private sector assets, in the form of pension funds, to have real control over those assets.

I am not committed to a state bureaucracy that delivers welfare benefits. I wish that we were debating a renaissance of friendly societies under which we could choose the means of receiving benefits. However, on the question of sickness pay and the national insurance scheme, I must take a stand. There is a coalition of interests between Members on both sides of the House. We are making a plea about rights of citizenship. There are some things in society that are so important and fundamental that provision must be made by the state. When the original sick pay scheme was introduced we lost that debate. I believe that the Government were able to get that change through the House only because employers and their representatives on the Government side were given a guarantee that it would involve no costs for employers.

The issue of principle at stake tonight is that that commitment is being broken in such a way that the weakest backs in industry will have to bear the burden. The Government are being given something of a fright. No Secretary of State introducing such a little rag-bag of amendments would have to spend an hour explaining them if there were not trouble from behind. That is especially so in this case because the Secretary of State for Social Security is one of the Government's best debaters. We all know that if the Government, despite their fright, get away with this, there will be another year, another series of negotiations, in which the Secretary of State will have to give as well as take. The Secretary of State knows that if he beats the employers by imposing these additional costs on them he will be able to come back on another occasion and increase the burden. The crucial commitment that was made is being broken. That is what we shall be voting about tonight, although we shall do so for differing reasons.

We have heard an awful lot from Opposition Members about small businesses. I am pleased about that. I wonder whether many people outside will regard the remarks as more than skin-deep. I hope that they were. Albeit with different motives, we are joining forces with people whose views we sometimes do not share. We are doing so because there is an important principle at stake. For Opposition Members, there are badges of citizenship that can very quickly be destroyed. The consequences of that destruction may not be felt immediately, but in the long term they may be seen in the form of social strife. Government Members have referred to the importance of small businesses and to the unfairness of putting the burden squarely on their shoulders so that other expenditure may be undertaken.

As I have said, there is in the House tonight a community of interests. For reasons that have been put forward by several hon. Members, I hope that we shall not simply support the amendments that have been forced on the Government by another place, but that we shall be able to persuade the Government to withdraw this squalid little measure—squalid not because the Secretary of State has in any way behaved dishonourably, but because there is a basic principle at stake. A commitment is being broken, and we are asking the poorest sections of the industrial world to bear the burden. There are hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to ensure that this Bill will not go through.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): These are unusual times. The recession that we are experiencing is unusually deep—deeper than recessions that we have known before. It is amazing that the Government should choose such a time for this plan.

As the inflation rate drops, real interest rates are increasingly high, and rising by the week. In Winchester, Alton and other parts of the country, normally prudent people are being driven into bankruptcy. This is extremely serious. Indeed, the situation goes back well beyond the past decade. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows, I voted against our entry into the exchange rate mechanism because I believed that it would result in higher interest rates and higher unemployment than we would otherwise have. That is now happening. Interest rates are now dictated not by our own economy, which is calling hard, through deflation, for lower interest rates, but by our exchange rate. That is absolutely wrong.

Small businesses constitute one of the hardest-hit sections of our economy. The Government's measures to support small businesses have my absolute support. However—I have been put under considerable pressure not just to keep my speech short but not to speak at all—I must urge my right hon. Friend to withdraw this measure in view of our present very exceptional economic circumstances. The proposals should be withdrawn in the national interest.

Mr. Flynn: It is unfortunate that two hon. Members on the Government side were absent for the major part of the debate. Had they been here they would have heard not

ranting from either side but very reasoned debate, indicating a community of interests. It is a matter to which my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) referred. On this subject, my credentials are rather similar to those of my hon. Friend, in that my maiden speech, too, was on the virtue of the sale of council houses. I raised that subject as a member of a Labour local authority that had been selling its houses for 20 years.

We heard a very unpleasant, spleen-hacked, neurotic diatribe from the hon. Member from Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who managed to pack a smear into almost every syllable. It is unfortunate that the debate should be conducted in such a way. I commend to those hon. Members who have not read the report of the Lords debate that they do so in order that they might be made aware of the elevated quality of debate in that Chamber. As democrats we should adopt the decisions that were reached there.

It has been suggested again and again that all will be well if we throw employees to the wolves without statutory sick pay. It has been argued that they are already protected. Let us get the position exactly right. The report of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has been misunderstood by *The Times*. The IFS did not say that 91 per cent. of employees are covered by sick pay schemes; it said only that 91 per cent. of all employees work for employers in whose cases some people are in some circumstances covered by sick pay schemes. What is the truth? For those working in dangerous occupations, the situation is even worse. For those working in low-paid occupations, it is far worse. The Secretary of State said that we did not have to worry. He made the point that in the early stages of a job —the first few weeks—people do not very often go off sick. In fact, such people are the very ones who are often involved in serious accidents at work and who are therefore likely to need sick pay.

The citizens advice bureaux carried out a trawl, the findings of which contradict the rather rosy picture that has been presented by Government Members. The bureaux found that far more problems are now arising because of employment difficulties. Members of Parliament are aware of that. The bureaux refer to a Nottinghamshire case in which an employer considered a client's pregnancy to have been self-inflicted and refused to pay her SSP. In Devonshire, a client who had worked for eight months as a night care assistant had to go into hospital. When the employer, having been contacted by the DSS, eventually returned the SSP form he stated that the woman was no longer employed by him and that therefore she was not entitled to SSP. In Hertfordshire, in the space of one month, seven employers refused to pay SSP to clients who were eligible for it. In Shropshire, a person who lived in tied accommodation was dismissed after two weeks of sickness and received no SSP. In Buckinghamshire, in a five-week period, there were five cases of employers failing to pay SSP. A deeper trawl will show hundreds of such cases.

It is not true to say, as the Secretary Secretary of State did, that there is some quid pro quo between the advantage to employers of lower contributions to national insurance and what will happen under the Bill. There is no linkage. All employers will benefit from the national insurance changes, but only employers unfortunate enough to have much sickness among their employees will suffer because of the Bill. We are placing a burden on employers, and the Bill will be a disincentive for them to employ disabled people or those whom they perceive as likely to suffer from long periods of sickness.

7 pm

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) referred to Henry VIII, and many of us would query her picture of him as a model parent and husband. The other place threw out the worst feature of the "Henry VIII clause". We have heard from courageous Conservative Members, employers' associations and trade unions a hallelujah chorus of protest against the idiocy of the Bill.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Bill is causing tremendous anxiety in Scotland? I have received a letter from Bill Knox, who is a well-known campaigner on behalf of the small business federations in Scotland. He says:

"The Government are pushing through a new Bill on S.S.P. which will destroy the principle that the State pays Statutory Benefits to employees."

Most organisations in Scotland are absolutely opposed to this stupid, silly measure that the Government have thought up.

Mr. Flynn: I am delighted to hear that the Scottish singers in the hallelujah chorus are in harmony with the rest of the country.

The Bill is discredited, wretched and friendless and we should throw it out.

Mr. Allen McKay: I place on record the views not of the employers' federations but of a small factory in my constituency which faces bankruptcy. The work force believed that they could make the business work, took it over and made it work. They phoned me today and said that if the Bill is passed it will probably shove them over the brink.

It is the principle that matters. Not only have the Government broken a promise, but they have had the effrontery to jeopardise the future of the scheme. Subsections (2) and (3) of clause 1 give the Government power to alter it without reference to the House, and that is wrong.

We are seeing a change in Government policy. The Secretary of State is always talking about the employers' contribution to the scheme. A good employer always added to the state provision for his work force, but the Government are now legislating for an alternative. The Government see occupational pension schemes as the future; employees and employers will pay, but the state will back out of its obligation to look after sick and retired people. That is what the Bill is all about. If the House has any common sense, it will throw out the Bill or, at worst, accept the Lords amendments.

Ms. Short: This is a dishonourable Bill which has been introduced in a dishonourable way. I am sorry to say that to the Secretary of State. I know that he is not a dishonourable man, but the record speaks for itself.

The Bill is a complete breach of the agreement made between the Government and employers' organisations, after considerable discussion and debate, that when statutory sick pay was introduced there would be 100 per cent. reimbursement and that the costs of administering the scheme would be repaid. That promise has been

[Ms. Short]

breached, and there is a sense of fury about that among employers' organisations. The hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) rightly said that integrity is involved. The Government have broken their word.

The Secretary of State gave three examples in which the employer would gain. I am afraid that that argument is dishonourable. We know that the package involves a saving. Any gains therefore mean other and larger losses elsewhere. To try to impress his hon. Friends, who are clearly disturbed about the Bill, with three examples of gainers when he knew that there must be more losers than gainers was dishonourable.

The Government knew that they had to be furtive about the Bill, which was brought before the House with indecent haste. It was given a Second Reading on a Monday and its Committee stage was held on the Floor of the House on the Wednesday. We know the purpose of that: the Government did not want to allow employers' organisations time to mobilise. They had fought before on the issue and would fight again. The Government fixed the business of the House so that they could not do so, which is why the brunt of the opposition to the Bill was expressed in the other place. That was another dishonourable act by the Government.

The Bill affects the interests of not only employers but workers. The change being made is part of a package of serious cuts in sick pay for employees. The uprating removes 3 million employees from eligibility for the higher rate of statutory sick pay. As a result, some 600,000 people stand to lose an average of £9 a week when they are sick, in addition to the 300,000 who will lose £13 a week as a result of the changes in sick pay entitlement that will take effect in April. No fewer than 5 million people have had their entitlement to statutory sick pay reduced in the past two years. That is an uncivilised move. If we live in a caring society that offers a decent standard of living, we should at least guarantee that if any of us have to take time off work because of sickness we shall be cared for and not forced on to means-tested benefits, with all the worries that that causes when another member of the family is working.

The whole move, which is part of a plan to privatise sick pay, is deeply regressive. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) pointed out, this proposal was made under the old Thatcherite Government, but this Government have not had time to throw it away. There is no doubt but that the best way of ensuring that everyone is protected is a national insurance scheme.

The Government want to privatise, and to do so they misuse statistics—this is another dishonourable feature—by saying that 91 per cent. of employees work for firms that offer an occupational sick pay scheme. That is a deeply dishonest figure. A firm that employed thousands of manual workers but offered a small scheme only to senior management would be included in that statistic. It is outrageous and misleading, but I am sorry to say that the Secretary of State keeps using it.

Occupational sick pay schemes build on state provision. Someone who is lucky enough to be in an occupational sickness scheme negotiates with his employer for him to build on the national insurance system.

The change has been made, apart from the questionable ideology behind it, because the Secretary of State was pressurised in the expenditure round. He had to do something with child benefit because it was becoming such an embarrassment. He found a little bit of money for the first born instead of uprating the benefit properly. I know that he has been concerned to do something for low-income elderly pensioners, but the Treasury would not give him anything and said, "If you want to increase child benefit, you must pay with something else out of your budget." Therefore, reluctantly, he gave up statutory sick pay and was forced into all the dishonour that we are discussing.

What is wrong is all the restraint imposed on the Secretary of State by other people. I respect him enough to think that if he was in control of these matters, things might be different; perhaps that is being over-trusting. Here the sick are being required to pay for benefits for the elderly and for children. That is wrong. Under the Government we have seen massive redistribution. If we accumulate the benefits and tax changes, what has happened? Up to 1989, £6·5 billion has been taken from the bottom 50 per cent. of the population and £4·6 billion of it has been given to the top 5 per cent. That is what it is all about. The Government have given away so much to the very rich in society that they have to take money from the sick for child benefit because they are so deeply embarrassed by their failure to improve it in the past.

All of this comes during the most frightening recession which is not being discussed politically because we are all preoccupied with the situation in the Gulf. The figures, which are coming in sharp and hard, and the personal experiences make the recession look as bad as that in 1980-81. I hope and pray that it will not be as bad. That recession destroyed my region and my constituency, and I hope that the same will not happen again. Firms are going bust all over the land. I cannot believe that Lewis's, where I went as a child to see Father Christmas, has gone.

The changes in statutory sick pay will come on top of the recession. They will tip some firms over. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) makes an art form out of nastiness—that is not intended as a compliment. I do not know how it is in his part of the world, but in Ladywood vast numbers of people who run small businesses vote Labour. Whether Afro-Caribbean, Asian or white, their interests lie with the well-being of the local community. Their children are local, unemployed young people; they worry about local schools; they are Labour voters in significant numbers.

I was surprised when my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) went along with the line put forward by the hon. Member for Teignbridge. Perhaps things are different in Birkenhead, but certainly in Ladywood many small business men vote Labour and are members of the Labour party. The hon. Member for Teignbridge is an ideologist. He has forgotten that the former leader, the one who would be impressed with his style of speech, is not in office any more. We are supposed to pretend that the Tory party is in favour of a classless society, as we screw the people who are sick in order to pay benefits to the elderly and the poor.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Ms. Short: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. If he changed his behaviour when people give way, I would think of doing so.

Mr. Nicholls: Give way and see.

Ms. Short: I do not believe it; I have seen the hon. Gentleman perform too often.

My hon. Friends and I agree with small businesses, the interests of people who are sick and the other place that the Bill should be withdrawn. If it is not, we shall support the amendments that were made in the other place which would at least improve the Bill somewhat.

The other insidious thing in the package is that when the Bill started, the Government took the power by negative resolution of the House to change the 80 per cent. rate. Clearly the plan was to keep reducing it. We moved an amendment to make the change by affirmative resolution and the Government accepted that. When the Bill got to the other place, they said that there had to be separate legislation. Of course, the Government hated that because it stopped the privatisation package, but they could hardly change it when it came back here without saying to the world, "Our plan is revealed." Reluctantly, they had to give in. We welcome that.

We support the amendment made in the other place that this should be a cost neutral package, we support the 91 per cent. provision that the Government have rejected, and we support the provisions made in the other place to protect small businesses, which are more generous than the measly proposals that the Secretary of State put before the House.

I am sorry to have had to put the case of dishonour to the right hon. Gentleman, but I believe it to be true. That is what we are considering this evening.

Mr. Newton: I shall be exceptionally brief for reasons which I hope the House will understand. I have already spoken at great length and I answered a huge number of points that were put to me during my opening speech.

I have made it clear to my hon. Friends that I recognise, even though I do not always agree with, some of the anxieties they have expressed. The combination of measures which I have brought forward, including the additional safeguard for small businesses, generously defined, in respect of periods of sickness going beyond six weeks, goes a long way to meet their concerns. Taken together with the fact that has emerged from some comments from the Opposition Benches that many small employers do not have occupational sick pay schemes and therefore will not be affected in the same way as those who do, the combination of facts leads me to believe that there are proper and appropriate safeguards which will ensure that large numbers of small businesses gain and will not lose from the package of proposals which I have put forward.

7.15 pm

I wish to make only one or two other points. I hope that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) will regret in due course the persistent use of words such as "dishonour" and "dishonourable". I will not quarrel with her at length, but this enables me to wrap up almost everything that I want to say to Opposition Members. I see nothing dishonourable, in a context in which there are endless demands for additional social security spending on many good causes, in being prepared to look across the scene to identify the areas where changes have taken place since the beginning of the welfare state and to make sure that we are spending the money which we can make available, however much it is, in the best way that we can spend it.

I say to the hon. Members for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that the growth of occupational sick pay schemes represents a big change in the perception of people about where the burdens of looking after short-term sickness should lie. Employers have accepted a greater share of that burden. In those circumstances, I welcome the opportunity and the scope to divert more of the resources which I can make available from the taxpayer and the contributer to the poorer pensioners who do not have much money, to those in residential care and nursing homes and to the long-term sick and disabled.

I will not accept that that is dishonourable. I will not apologise for it. I think that this is a sensible package, improved by the amendments that I have proposed, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 2 agreed to.—[Special entry.]

Lords amendment No. 3: In page 1, line 14, leave out "80" and insert "91"

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

The House divided: Ayes 316, Noes 236.

Division No. 57] **[7.17 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hall'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas

Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, Tony
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment accordingly disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 4 to 6 agreed to.—[Special entry.]

Lords amendment No. 7: After clause 1, insert the following new clause—*Small employers' relief—*

".—(1) In section 9 of the Social Security and Housing Benefits Act 1982, before subsection (2) (meaning of "contributions payments") there shall be inserted—

"(1B) For the purposes of this section, a payment of statutory sick pay which an employer is liable to make to an employee for any day qualifies for small employers' relief if the employer is a small employer who has before that day been liable to make such payments of statutory sick pay as entitle him to relief in respect of that payment.

(1C) For the purposes of this section, "small employer" shall be defined by regulations by reference to the aggregate of the employer's and the employee's contributions payments for any prescribed period, such aggregate to be reviewed annually having regard to the increase in earnings and the effect of any such increase on the amount of contributions payments.

(1D) Regulations shall prescribe the payments of statutory sick pay that entitle a small employer to small employer's relief in respect of any particular payment, and that entitlement shall be determined by reference to the number of weeks for which the employer has been liable to pay statutory sick pay in respect of the employee in question in a prescribed period.

(1E) The first regulations made under this section shall prescribe that the amount of the aggregate of the employer's and the employee's contributions payments, and the number of weeks for which the employer has been liable to pay statutory sick pay in respect of the employee in question shall be in accordance with the following table:—

Aggregate contributions in the previous contributions year	*Number of weeks before small employers' relief applies*
less than £15,000	6
less than £10,000	3
less than £5,000	0

(1F) A statutory instrument containing (whether alone or with other provisions) regulations under subsection (1C) or (1D) above shall not be made unless a draft of it has been laid before Parliament and approved by a resolution of each House."

(2) In subsection (2) of that section (meaning of "contributions payments" in subsections (1)(a) and (1A)) for the words "and subsection (1A)" there shall be substituted the words "and subsection (1C)".

(3) In Part II of Schedule 5 to the Social Security Act 1986 (questions for the Secretary of State) in paragraph (b), after sub-paragraph (v) there shall be inserted the words "or

(vi) the amount of an employer's contributions payments for any period for the purposes of regulations under section 9(1C) of that Act.""

Read a Second time.

Amendment (a) proposed to the Lords amendment, in line 7, leave out from 'day' to end of line 35 and insert—

'which forms part of a period of incapacity for work qualifies for small employers' relief if—

(a) on that day the employer is a small employer who has been liable to pay statutory sick pay in respect of that employee for earlier days forming part of that period of incapacity for work; and

(b) the aggregate amount of those payments exceeds the entitlement threshold, that is to say an amount equal to W x R, where—

W is a prescribed number of weeks; and

R is the appropriate weekly rate set out in section above;

and regulations may make provision for calculating the entitlement threshold in any case where the employee's entitlement to statutory sick pay is calculated by reference to different weekly rates in the same period of incapacity for work.

(1C) If the Secretary of State by order so provides for any tax year, the following subsections shall have effect for that tax year in substitution for subsection (1B) above—

"(1BB) For the purposes of this section, a payment of statutory sick pay which an employer is liable to make to an employee for any day in a tax year qualifies for small employers' relief if—

(a) on that day the employer is a small employer who has been liable to make payments of statutory sick pay for earlier days in that tax year in respect of any employees of his; and

(b) the aggregate of any such payments for those earlier days exceeds a prescribed sum.

(1BC) In any case where—

(a) an employer is liable to make two or more payments of statutory sick pay for the same day in a tax year, and

(b) by virtue of the condition in subsection (1BB)(b) above, none of those payments would qualify for small employers' relief, but

(c) that condition would have been fulfilled in relation to a proportion of the aggregate amount of those payments, had he been liable—

(i) to pay as statutory sick pay for an earlier day in that tax year, instead of for the day in question, the smallest part of that aggregate that would enable that condition to be fulfilled, and

(ii) to pay the remainder as statutory sick pay for the day in question,

he shall be treated for the purposes of subsection (1BB) above as if he had been liable to make payments of statutory sick pay as mentioned in paragraph (c) above instead of as mentioned in paragraph (a) above.

(1BD) If, in a case not falling within subsection (1BC) above—

(a) an employer is liable to make a single payment of statutory sick pay for a day in a tax year, and

(b) by virtue of the condition in subsection (1BB)(b) above, that payment would not qualify for small employers' relief, but

(c) that condition would have been fulfilled in relation to a proportion of that payment, had he been liable—

(i) to pay as statutory sick pay for an earlier day in that tax year, instead of for the day in question, the smallest part of that payment that would enable that condition to be fulfilled, and

(ii) to pay the remainder as statutory sick pay for the day in question,

he shall be treated for the purposes of subsection (1BB) above as if he had been liable to make payments of statutory sick pay as mentioned in paragraph (c) above instead of the payment mentioned in paragraph (a) above.";

and, without prejudice to section 45(1) below, the Secretary of State may by regulations make such transitional or consequential

provision or savings as he considers necessary or expedient in connection with the coming into force of an order under this subsection of the expiry or revocation of any such order and the consequent revival of subsection (1B) above.

(1D) For the purposes of this section, "small employer" shall have the meaning assigned to it by regulations, and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, any such regulations—

(a) may define that expression by reference to the amount of an employer's contributions payments for any prescribed period; and

(b) if they do so, may in that connection make provision for the amount of those payments for that prescribed period—

(i) to be determined without regard to any deductions that may be made from them under this section or under any other enactment or instrument; and

(ii) in prescribed circumstances, to be adjusted, estimated or otherwise attributed to him by reference to their amount in any other prescribed period.

(1E) If and so long as regulations under subsection (1D) above prescribe an amount which an employer's contributions payments must not exceed if he is to be a small employer for the purposes of this section, the Secretary of State shall in each tax year consider whether that amount should be increased, having regard to any increase in the aggregate amount of all primary and secondary Class 1 contributions payable in Great Britain and such other matters as he considers appropriate.'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 233.

Division No. 58] **[7.32 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*

Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, Tony
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments (b) and (c) to the Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to.—[Special entry.]

Lords amendments Nos. 8 and 9 agreed to.

Ordered,

That a Committee be appointed to draw up a reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 3.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Ordered,

That Mr. Secretary Newton, Mr. Nicholas Scott, Mr. Irvine Patnick, Mr. Alfred Morris and Mr. Allen McKay be members of the Committee.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Ordered,

That three be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Ordered,

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Reason for disagreeing to one of the Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Namibia Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

7.47 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to modify existing legislation to place Namibia on an equal footing with other Commonwealth countries for the purposes of United Kingdom law. It is a relatively uncontentious process—at least I hope that it is. However, the Bill gives us an opportunity to consider Namibia's achievements as it approaches the first anniversary of its independence and its membership of the Commonwealth.

For me and many hon. Members on both sides of the House, this is a happy occasion when we can welcome the 50th member of the Commonwealth. It is also probably the best time for me to be involved in such a Bill, as I returned last Saturday from my first visit to Windhoek. I was delighted to meet President Nujoma and present to him the Government's gift to independent Namibia of a parliamentary mace. It was a suitable gift. Namibia has sincerely and enthusiastically embraced the way of parliamentary democracy. It is already demonstrating to other countries in the region that democracy is the best way to stability and prosperity.

Namibia is also determined to end the hostilities that divided the country before independence. It is pursuing a policy of national reconciliation designed to ensure that there is a place in its new society for all Namibians, regardless of their previous loyalties. Those policies are well worthy of support. Therefore, we have built up a sound working relationship with the President and the new Government. Our aid programme is an important element in that relationship. We have pledged £10 million over three years, which is to be devoted to police training, education, health, and, indeed, other projects.

Our assistance is designed to encourage good government, accountability and cost-effective use of resources. At President Nujoma's request, and outside the £10 million package of aid, we are also helping to train the Namibian army, providing vital support to maintain law and order and achieve the stability which is essential for sound development. We can be justly proud of our military training team which is training soldiers in many parts of the country. I was pleased and privileged to meet several members of the British military advisory and training team in Namibia and to talk with Namibian soldiers from all over the country who expressed, with increasing firmness of grasp of the English language, their pleasure and indeed their appreciation of what they were gaining from training with the British Army.

The Bill follows earlier precedents, the most recent of which was the Pakistan Act 1990. It covers Namibia's relationship with the Commonwealth Institute. It provides for Namibian forces to be included in the definition of "Commonwealth forces" so as to define their legal status, for example when training in the United Kingdom. It provides for the exercise of command and discipline when British and Commonwealth forces are serving together and for attachments of members of one force to another.

The Bill also ensures that regulatory powers applying to the whaling industry will not apply to ships registered in

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

Namibia, as it is not appropriate for those powers to extend to the shipping of independent members of the Commonwealth.

Clause 2(2) deems the measure to have come into force on 21 March 1990, the day Namibia achieved independence and became a member of the Commonwealth. There is no technical reason for that, but there is strong symbolic value in deeming the provisions of the measure to come into effect on Namibia's independence day. The immigration and electoral implications of Namibia's admission to the Commonwealth have been dealt with separately by an Order in Council which came into effect on 20 August 1990. That added Namibia to the list of Commonwealth countries in schedule 3 to the British Nationality Act 1981.

My two and a half days in Namibia made me happy because I could see a country coming to grips with many problems and new challenges but with an enthusiasm and willingness to learn that I have rarely seen anywhere before. It is right that we should help Namibia. We are at that vital time when we are sitting down together, with Ministers and with the director of the National Planning Commission, to work out how we can help the people of Namibia best in the way that they agree is what they want.

It is very much a partnership in development in Namibia, with its population of just over 1·6 million people, but a vast country which needs a lot of help from its friends. We are very much a friend of Namibia, and I was a warm friend of the Namibian people last week. They welcome us in every way in helping them along their new path as an independent country and a member of the Commonwealth.

7.52 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The Minister is right. The Bill is welcomed by hon. Members in all parts of the House. Its details are technical, but it marks an event of great importance. The independence of Namibia, celebrated on 21 March last year, was a great achievement for the international community, particularly for the United Nations and most of all for the Namibian people.

The months since independence have seen a remarkable attempt at reconciliation in a country wounded by years of war and division. The SWAPO Government have been resolutely pragmatic in pursuing their goal of national reconciliation, as the right hon. Lady said. Who would have imagined that a new police training college would be opened last February with 82 new recruits from SWAPO members and 90 former members of the securfity force Koevoet.

The determination with which the Government and people have set about healing divisions and rebuilding the country deserves great praise. But the magnitude of the task cannot be overestimated, as the Minister said. South African rulers have left behind widespread deprivation, gross inequality, unemployment, abysmally inadequate services in black areas, heavy dependence on mining, reliance on South African markets, debt and a massive budget deficit.

Whites represent 7 per cent. of the population yet receive 70 per cent. of the income. For every 1,000 births, 10 times as many black children die before their fifth birthday as white children. Under South African rule, more than half of Namibia's GNP went to foreign companies in the South African administration. Only white children enjoyed free compulsory education. About 70 per cent. of Namibia's teachers lack the necessary basic qualifications to teach.

Now that independence has been achieved, the great potential of the economy must be developed for the benefit of the majority of Namibians. But the economy is distorted and fragile. The exodus of South African and then of the United Nations transition assistance group forces, and the return of 40,000 refugees, are to be welcomed, but they put great strains on Namibia's resources. The Government are aiming for annual economic growth of between 3 and 4 per cent., but current growth is stagnant, if not negative. A report by the International Monetary Fund says:

"The nation has a strong resource base that offers substantial economic potential."

Realising that potential will be difficult. The international community must do everything possible to help with the reconstruction of Namibia, and Walvis bay must be one of the first priorities. The biggest obstacle to revamping Namibia's economy is the continuing occupation by South Africa of Walvis bay. The port is an integral part of the Namibian economy and could be a lifeline for the whole region. Without it, trade cannot flourish.

Namibia's fishing waters are its most valuable asset. According to the World bank, fishing alone could account for a doubling of GNP over the next five to six years. But South Africa's continuing occupation of Walvis bay, Namibia's only deep sea port, is a major impediment to the development of the fishing industry. Uncertainty over the port's future is slowing down investment in that crucial sector, and if the fish are not clearly products of an ACP country and processed on ACP territory, their special access to the EC is in jeopardy.

South Africa's claim to 12 offshore islands means that it claims 15 per cent. of Namibian waters and, therefore, 15 per cent. of the revenues from concessions granted to fishing companies operating in those waters. Other countries, including Zimbabwe, Botswana and Zambia, have expressed keen interest in using Walvis bay as a trade outlet. Plans to export coal from Zimbabwe are already under way. But the opportunity for the port to contribute to regional economic development can be fully realised only once the port is back in Namibia's hands.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Does the hon. Lady believe that, if the scenario that she has painted were to come about, South Africa would have any part to play in the future of Walvis bay, perhaps not on the present lines but in some future trading arrangement?

Mrs. Clwyd: Yes, on the same basis as many other countries would contribute—on proper commercial terms. That is the position that one would expect South Africa to take if it ended its illegal occupation. The United Nations Security Council set May 1975 as the deadline for its withdrawal. The deadline passed and the UN did nothing. In 1978, the Security Council passed resolution 432 calling for the reintegration of Walvis bay into Namibia. Now, strong international pressure—which must include friends of South Africa such as the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle)—is needed to implement that resolution.

I understand that since 1979 the British Government have not once gone on record expressing their concern

about South Africa's continuing defiance of the UN. Is the Foreign Office so keen to encourage Pretoria—one could not blame the Foreign Office for wishing to continue to do that—that it will remain silent about Namibia's lifeline? I hope that that is not the case.

Ministers have in the past replied to our concerns about Walvis bay by saying that the Namibian and South African Governments should negotiate the issue bilaterally and are prepared to do so. If that is the case, may we be told what evidence there is that South Africa is prepared to negotiate and what progress is being made?

The Namibian Government are determined to aim for self-reliance and the Minister is well aware of that. They certainly have no intention of becoming dependent on an international begging bowl. The conference for private investors taking place there this week demonstrates the importance attached to private sector growth, joint ventures and foreign investment. Foreign Governments and official donors still have a major role to play, particularly in the first few transitional years.

The population has high hopes and it is crucial that we help the Government to meet some of their expectations as soon as possible. The British Government's immediate contribution of £10 million on independence is, of course, welcome but that cannot be it for the next three years. After all, independent Namibia—a country with which Britain has been closely linked for decades—is now setting out on a bold path of economic and political regeneration and has just joined the Commonwealth. Surely it deserves more than £10 million over three years. After all, we gave Poland £100 million for economic stabilisation, without hesitation.

In practical terms, the ODA's contribution amounts to sending out some experts and to giving advice. The main sector of need identified by the ODA before independence was English language training, yet nearly a year later one would search in vain to find more than two British educationists working on that scheme.

In the sphere of greatest human need—the impoverished subsistence farming on which 70 per cent. of Namibians depend—it seems that the ODA has done little except to send out one agronomist on an exploratory visit. It is not as though independence came just last month or was an unexpected surprise. It is embarrassing that the official handout from the Namibian Government lists Germany, Sweden, Finland, the United States and Norway as significant donors, but not Britain. Black farmers need support services and infrastructure, but, most of all, they need land. The Namibian Government are holding a conference on that crucial issue in June. Land reform has always been politically explosive, but it is essential if the poorest farmers are to be able to provide for themselves, rural communities are to develop and the grossly skewed economy is to develop in a more balanced way. I hope that the ODA will respond quickly to whatever is decided at the land conference. Namibians have proved themselves willing to put pragmatism before ideology, and I hope that the Government will not allow their ideology to inhibit support for vital land reform, if and when there are reforms in Namibia.

Expanded trade is even more important than aid. Namibia's trade is overwhelmingly dependent on South Africa and a few commodities selling at low and stagnant prices. Diversification into new markets and new goods must be supported. Namibia's accession to the Lome IV treaty is therefore welcomed. The next step should be an EC-Namibia fisheries agreement to promote the development of an indigenous fishing sector. Is the United Kingdom doing anything to secure that? Why have our Government not yet signed Lome IV?

Namibia does not have the crushing debt burden suffered by some of its neighbours, but the justification for debt release is nevertheless overwhelming. Nambia's debt was illegally incurred by the South African regime. I see no reason why the people of Namibia should be expected to repay about £220 million borrowed by their oppressors to exploit them. What is the Government's view, and what action is being taken on what must be considered an illegitimate debt?

Political development in a newly independent Namibia is just as important as economic development. The SWAPO Government are to be congratulated on their commitment, as the Minister said, to multi-party democracy. I expect the international community to give every encouragement and support to its development. However, despite the Government's fine words about human rights and democracy, they do not seem to be seizing the opportunity to establish them firmly in Namibia. Why are they giving only £10 million over three years to Namibia when they can afford to give £40 million, £50 million and even £60 million to Malawi, Kenya and Nigeria each year?

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I am trying to follow what the hon. Lady is saying, but she is painting a picture as though Namibia were our original responsibility. It was the responsibility, first, of Germany, then of the League of Nations and then it came under the South African mandate. It is basically a German-South African-United Nations problem. What we contribute surely amounts to a generous gesture on the part of our Government.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am surprised that the hon. Lady thinks that only one country should feel any responsibility towards Namibia. I am sure that all hon. Members feel that they have a big responsibility towards Namibia. It is not just a matter for one country.

Mr. John Carlisle: Why?

Mrs. Clwyd: If that is not clear to the hon. Gentleman he should ask the South African Government, with whom he is so closely associated.

Namibia has joined the Commonwealth and I think that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) would agree that, in the commonwealth of nations, we all have responsibilities towards each other.

The past abuse of human rights, by both sides fighting the war, has been gruesomely documented by many sources. The new constitution includes important human rights guarantees.

As the main provider of training for the Namibian police and security forces, the British Government have a special obligation to ensure that the new commitment to human rights can be implemented. Amnesty International has called for a theoretical and practical course on human rights to be incorporated into the police and military training programmes run by the British, and I am sure that we wholeheartedly endorse that call. I understand that Namibians are in the United Kingdom now for Ministry of Defence training. Is human rights training included?

The changes in Namibia over the past year have been enormous, but the entire southern Africa region is

[Mrs. Clwyd]

undergoing a gradual transformation. The human and economic costs of South African aggression and destabilisation have been astronomic. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that southern Africa needs at least $2·5 billion a year, over four years, to repair the economic damage caused by South Africa alone.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Clwyd: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again. We are well aware of his interests, and I hope he will contribute to the debate at the appropriate time.

Namibia has a key role in southern Africa. Investment in Namibia and in the region must go hand in hand. British aid to SADCC—the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference—is low compared with other donors. But I am particularly concerned to find that EC aid to SADCC has fallen significantly in real terms from Lomé III to Lomé IV, just at a time when SADCC needs additional resources to incorporate Namibia into its programme of action.

New opportunities for democracy and development exist in Namibia and are emerging throughout southern Africa that simply have not been seen before. We must grasp those opportunities and invest in them. Namibia's potential for political and economic success, in a region that has been so riven with strife, and in a continent where so many economies are shrinking and so many dictators remain, is enormous. I urge the Government to realise the magnitude of the task of reconstruction, and to ensure that Britain's contribution matches that task.

8.9 pm

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): The Bill is commendably brief and I trust that my speech will be likewise. I join in giving the Bill a warm welcome from the Government Back Benches.

I well remember in November 1989 leading a parliamentary observer mission made up of Members of Parliament from three European countries under the auspices of the International Freedom Foundation to observe the first free elections under United Nations auspices. We were happy to conclude from our observations that the elections were as free and fair as possible in the circumstances and I have followed Namibia's progress ever since.

The immediate gain from those elections, in which the South West Africa People's Organisation got less than two thirds of the votes cast, was that SWAPO came together with old enemies——

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will the hon. Gentleman, perhaps with certain humility, compare in percentage terms the popular support for SWAPO with that for his own party at the last election?

Sir George Gardiner: This is not the right occasion to be drawn into such a comparison. If I were to answer that question, no doubt I would be out of order anyway.

The point that I was trying to make, which Labour Members might listen to and they might even agree with, is that the one gain was that SWAPO came together with its old enemies to draft a constitution—a good constitution—and then to join them in Government. That good start has been maintained and I echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on that.

We have now a Namibia which is a multi-party democracy and that is a gain. It has an entrenched Bill of Rights, which is highly commendable. Despite SWAPO's Marxist past, it has taken a constructive attitude to existing and new businesses and attracting foreign investment.

Despite the points made by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), the Namibian Government has, by contrast, shown some restraint over pressing its claim to Walvis bay and has maintained good relations with South Africa, on which it is to be congratulated.

There are some anxieties. Fusing the armed forces of the two former warring sides into one army, the fighters of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia on one side and Koevoet police members on the other, led to predictable problems, some of which have yet to be resolved. I hope that the provisions of the Bill with regard to visiting forces will help in an integration which must be fair to all parties.

The other anxiety that I encountered when visiting Namibia was on behalf of the bushmen whom I met at Omega. They were concerned about whether their position would be properly protected under the new constitution and I gather that that concern persists. Nevertheless, that does not detract from the fact that we have a new, independent and free Namibia which has got off to a good start and is certainly a worthy member of the commonwealth of nations.

8.13 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I rise briefly to express warm support for the Bill on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. As the Minister for Overseas Development said, as did the hon. Members for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner), Namibia is moving in a positive and constructive way.

During the long period of the war and the agitation few doubted that independence would eventually be achieved, but many feared that the bitterness that would follow would leave suppurating wounds which would last a long time. It is remarkable that that problem seems to have been quickly overcome, and that commands our admiration and support.

I have visited Namibia only once and that was while it was still under the South African mandate. At that time I had a long meeting with Mr. Ahtisaari, the Finnish United Nations representative. This is an opportunity to pay tribute once more to the long involvement of United Nations officials in preparing the way for Namibia's independence and her entry into the Commonwealth.

I had four questions to ask, but three have already been answered by the Minister. One was a question on aid, another on debt—an important matter—and the third a question on Walvis bay. My fourth question results in part from my own curiosity. One of the fascinating things about Namibia is a unique little town called Swakopmund, the majority of whose occupants were Germans.

There was much worry during the war about the Germans' safety and even talk of taking them in jumbo jets back to Germany. I understand that many of those fears and anxieties have been resolved. The Minister mentioned a commitment of the new Namibian open society to the involvement of all its people from whatever background.

I would be interested to know how the German element, which was also referred to by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), is fitting into the new independent country.

I end simply by repeating that I warmly welcome the Bill and the way in which the Minister presented it to us. I am sure that there will be no opposition to it from any Bench tonight.

8.16 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I welcome the Bill. It is a great step forward that Namibia has become a member of the Commonwealth. It is important to emphasise that it applied to become a member. That is significant for the growth of the Commonwealth.

I have had the privilege of being chairman of the executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for the past three years and we strongly welcome Namibia's membership of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The British branch of that association is planning to send a seminar on parliamentary democracy to Namibia, and that is a good step forward. Parliamentarians and Officers of the House will present that seminar. Namibia has invited them to do so and has welcomed the prospect of such a seminar.

I am particularly delighted to speak for a few moments on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and to say how much we welcome what has happened in Namibia. Many hon. Members have already said how remarkable it is that a country that went through such a traumatic time has since worked so closely together, healing wounds which many of us thought would take generations to heal.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) was a little niggly in her approach to the debate. One cannot compare loans to Poland with grants to Namibia. They are different things. She was not quite as magnanimous as she might have been.

On that note, I welcome the Bill. I hope that Namibia goes from strength to strength. Perhaps one day it will invite me to go there.

8.18 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this relatively short and uncontroversial debate on a Bill which will receive its Second Reading without dissent.

I have always taken an extremely close and positive interest in southern African affairs. I went to Namibia in 1989 during the process which led to independence, at which time I was accompanied by John McDonald, a human rights lawyer, and guided by Alison Harvey of the Namibian Christian Exchange, which sponsored the visit.

When the election process started in April, there were certain difficulties—as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), who was there, can testify. At the time of my visit in May, although there was an air of enthusiasm and a determination to achieve independence, some anxiety remained about the role of Casspirs and Koevoet. In any event, we offered criticism where it was necessary, and gave encouragement where it was due—as well as voicing strong words, when we thought that would be useful.

We have all been greatly encouraged by subsequent events. The Minister referred to Namibia's determination to make democracy work. Everyone whom we met during the pre-election period was obviously committed to that objective. The Minister spoke also of national reconciliation, and we found a great deal of commitment to that as well. The campaign for the three Rs included reconciliation, which was viewed as essential once independence was achieved. Even in the difficult days when many problems remained to be overcome, there was enthusiasm and a determination to achieve independence, and to make it work.

We all welcome Namibia's admission as the 50th member of the commonwealth of nations, for many reasons. South Africa is still undergoing the difficult process of ending apartheid. We applaud the measures that President de Klerk announced last Friday, but we recognise that there may be many obstacles in the way. Nevertheless, the example of Namibia's success on their doorstep must encourage people in South Africa in the belief that change can work. I look forward to the day —which I hope will be in the not-too-distant future—when the House debates the admission of South Africa as the 51st member of the Commonwealth. Unanimous approval of that by the House would mean that South Africa had done everything that we wanted in ending apartheid, and in making the advances that we all want in that country. The sooner that day comes, the better. I am sure that it will be widely welcomed, even if some right hon. and hon. Members would not be too happy about such a development.

In the case of Namibia's elections, the role specified for the United Nations was of supervising and controlling the elections. That was very different from the monitoring role that the UN has traditionally played and should serve as a lesson to other countries where we want a return to democracy. Token monitoring is not sufficient and we hope that the United Nations will supervise and control future elections, to ensure true democracy in many more countries.

The Minister referred to the fishing industry, whose importance to Namibia is widely recognised. In fact, I raised that matter with the Minister at Question Time yesterday. The fishing industry is important not only in terms of employment but to the nation's economy. We acknowledge the difficult negotiations concerning Walvis bay, but I hope that they will reach a satisfactory conclusion soon. Namibia's fishing industry is important also to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana and other countries, which would welcome the opportunity to use Walvis bay for their import and export trade. That would also bring economic advantages to Namibia, at a time when it has financial difficulties.

The Minister referred to Namibia's courageous decision to adopt the English language, although Afrikaans is dominant in many parts of the country, as German is in others. Namibia recognises that if it is to take its place in the modern world, it has to adopt the English language in developing as an international nation, and as a member of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations.

Namibia has gone a long way in a short time. I was in South Africa when the announcement was made that it intended to implement United Nations resolution 435 and

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

start the process of granting independence to Namibia which came as a bombshell after so many years of prevarication and of dodging the issue.

We warmly welcome Namibia's entry into the Commonwealth, which will be backdated in the way that the Bill proposes. We wish that country well in the future. I hope that Namibia will serve as an encouragement to its close neighbour, South Africa, in completing the process of ending apartheid, so that those two nations, side by side, can play a major role in the future of the world. I certainly hope that, one day, we shall welcome a South Africa that has taken all the right decisions as the 51st member of the Commonwealth.

8.27 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I join my hon. Friends in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister on the sensitivity and the timing of the Bill, and on enabling it to come into effect on the anniversary of Namibia's independence. I also congratulate Namibia on its subsequent decision to join the Commonwealth. It could not have taken a better one.

The Commonwealth is sometimes described by the world's press, and by our own, as being something less than exciting—but those of us who work in the Commonwealth know full well that it is an expanding, energetic and sympathetic forum. It achieves far more, not through controversy, but by working together—which does not lend itself to journalistic exploitation.

As you, Mr. Speaker, are a former governor of the Commonwealth Institute, I am sure that you would want to associate yourself with my next remark. As one of the institute's present governors, I welcome the opportunity that the legislation offers Namibia to participate in the institute's activities and affairs. It is a fine medium for enabling the nature and the shape of a country in the Commonwealth to be understood in Britain, and in other member countries, too. I look forward, on behalf of all the institute's governors, to Namibia's full participation in its activities.

I reinforce the welcome given by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant), who referred to Namibia's relationship with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Those of us fortunate enough to attend the plenary conference this year in Harare will remember for a long time the contribution made by the representatives of Namibia, who attended as observers on that occasion. The speech by the Deputy Speaker was remarkable in its emotion, perception, generosity and understanding. It certainly had to be one of the high points, together with the contribution made by other members of that delegation. They are now full members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and we shall look forward to their full participation in all activities and panels during the plenary conference in Delhi this coming year. It must be an exciting prospect for them, as it is for us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West mentioned the proposal to develop a parliamentary seminar for Namibia, but I look forward to being able to welcome members of the Namibian House in Westminster at our parliamentary seminars and visits in the near future. I am certain that we both have a lot to give and to receive, and I look forward to a growing relationship and participation in the form of Westminster parliamentary democracy, which is what the Commonwealth is about.

8.30 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): This is a happy day for Namibia, for the Commonwealth and for the House. Namibia has no greater friends in the House than my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), and for Burnley (Mr. Pike). Indeed, they are to a free, non-racial South Africa, and tonight Namibia, what the hon. Members for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) and for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) are to apartheid South Africa—firm friends and advocates. Those hon. Members may well laugh, but they are known in the House as the Castor and Pollux of apologists for apartheid in South Africa. I did say "Pollux"—I do not want to offend the hon. Member for Reigate any more than I intend to. It is refreshing to hear a speech from the hon. Member for Reigate with which one was not totally out of sympathy. The interventions of the hon. Member for Luton, North were entirely in character—unpleasant in the extreme.

I do not want to mar this happy debate by making remarks of a partisan or party political nature because the Minister for Overseas Development, who is sitting on the Government Front Bench, is also a good and firm friend of Namibia, and I well remember a night some time ago —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—during an Adjournment debate on this subject, when she gave a warm, sensitive speech, which showed that she was especially concerned about the problems that Namibia was facing at that time. Happily, those problems have been overcome. We now look to the right hon. Lady to show what a good and firm friend of Namibia she is by prevailing upon the Treasury and other members of the Cabinet to ensure that she and the Government follow the advice given her by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley about wholehearted support and an aid programme from this country and the European Community, which is vital if this new-found member of the Commonwealth is to get off to the start it deserves.

The decision of the people of Namibia about the use of the English language is important. That language has the capacity to heal some of the wounds that have opened up in that country over the years. It has an important role to play in Namibia's development and in overcoming the appalling education system that existed prior to Namibia's independence.

The British Council must be given all the assistance and support that it needs by the Government so that it can fulfil its important role in Namibia. The British Council has done much to be proud of in Africa. It has contributed much to its development, and to the education of its people. Now it is much needed in Namibia—as it is in South Africa—and it is to be hoped that the right hon. Lady will tell us that she accepts the special role that the British Council has to play in Namibia and will do all she can to further its cause.

So this is a happy night, a night which we shall remember when we look forward to a new member joining the Commonwealth—a multi-party, non-racial state, which is an example to the Commonwealth in general and to South Africa, its neighbour, in particular.

8.35 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I agree with the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) about the English language. I am only thankful that he does not propose to export the Welsh language there, or at least not before he has had some advice on pronuciation from his hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

If Castor and Pollux are on the Conservative side of the House, I suspect that Sagittarius has been trying to fire a few barbs into this debate from the Opposition Benches. There is, however, a real divide in this debate, which is exemplified by some of the hon. Members who have spoken—the divide between those hon. Members who have been to Namibia and those who wish to go.

I must declare that I have been to Namibia, in the run-up to the free and fair elections which we are celebrating. I was not in the same group as my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner), as I went a little before that. So, I celebrate this occasion with a memory full of pictures of that beautiful country, from the Zambezi to Windhoek and the bush in Ovamboland and elsewhere. The country has tremendous charm and potential for tourism, among other things, once it has settled down.

We can also celebrate the way in which Namibia reached independence. It is an enormous credit to the Namibian people and to the many people who went to help them that 40,000 people were brought back into the country—although not the 80,000 expected, according to the United Nations statistics—were resettled in the country and registered for an election. Anyone who has travelled around the bush areas of the Ovamboland and Kavanga will realise that it is incredible that registration for a free and fair democratic election could conceivably have operated there, but it did. I believe that slightly more people registered than had been estimated as the population of the country at the time, but that demonstrates the success of bringing people back into the country, and also the success in the running of the election.

Tribute must be paid to the people of Namibia and also to two individuals, one of whom has already been referred to by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston)—Maarti Ahtisaari, whose role is greatly to be admired. He must also be admired for fending off some of the pressures behind him from the United Nations, and showing his independence as the special representative. Tribute must also be paid to Mr. Jan Pienaar, the South African administrator general, who fended off some of the pressure from behind him from South Africa. Between them they brought this process to a happy conclusion.

Now Namibia is a new independent country with enormous opportunities which have been listed. The opportunities for the fishing industry have been mentioned. I agree with the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), but the British Government acknowledge that Walvis Bay is part of Namibia. We have accepted that. It is in the constitution and has been accepted by South Africa. The question is how we bring those two independent nations together to try to resolve any outstanding differences. That question is based on the fact—a constitutional fact—that the territory concerned is deemed by the international community, and certainly by this country, to be part of independent Namibia.

Fish, minerals and other natural resources are assets and there is considerable optimism. The white population —civil servants, for instance—stayed when the new Government came in; so did business men and there are enormous opportunities for industrial investment.

The election has overcome the challenges that resulted from the domination of the Ovambo people, which amounts to 40 per cent. of the population—comparable to the domination of the Serbs in Yugoslavia. It was, perhaps, helpful that SWAPO did not achieve the two-thirds majority that could have given it control of the constitution; the resulting brake has been used sensibly, achieving a compromise that has led not only to the initial stages of constitutional rearrangement but to subsequent compromises, such as the acceptance of the executive president and—I say this in hushed tones—the introduction of proportional representation. Perhaps most important was the agreement that there should be no detention without trial. All that gives us confidence in the future of the country.

There is, however, a debit side. I hope that, through the good offices of my right hon. Friend the Minister and, indeed, all hon. Members, the European Community will not forget southern Africa while it gives support to eastern Europe, and will ensure that countries such as Namibia receive their fair share of development aid. Debt is a great problem, as is drought.

We return again and again, however, to the question of education. As the hon. Member for Brent, South pointed out, one of the greatest gifts that this country can give Namibia is the English language. It was tragic, in a sense, to see the newly returned politicians of Namibia trying to make themselves understood—politically and in every other way—in Afrikaans, which was the only language common to their audience. I hope that English will be the symbol of the country's new independence.

The Bill is simple, but it symbolises an enormous achievement on the part of this country. In welcoming it, we are highlighting both the possibilities revealed for the United Nations and perhaps, in a future debate, we shall consider how that could relate to other countries, such as Cambodia—and the example that Namibia is setting its neighbour, South Africa, and many other countries in independent Africa.

8.42 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): As others have said, this is a happy occasion: almost a year has passed since Namibian independence. It was certainly one of the happiest days of my life when I was invited, as chairman of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, to join in the celebrations of the constituency assembly that was making the arrangements for independence day.

Although this is not the time to indulge in bad memories of the past, we must remember the many years of sacrifice on the part of the Namibian people in their fight for independence. That started much earlier than the elections. We must record the fact that the United Nations was somewhat dilatory; but, because this is a happy occasion, we must set all that aside for the moment.

Much has changed. One of the most heartening aspects, which will greatly benefit the future of South Africa, is the spirit of reconciliation that has been abroad. Namibian people of all races have said that what happened in the past is past. When a country achieves independence, astonishing things happen: perhaps one of the most astonishing was my being chided in the House by the

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

Foreign Secretary, and reminded that I should be as moderate as Sam Njomo. That was really something, in view of what had been said about him over the years! It certainly startled me.

Mrs. Chalker: Did the hon. Gentleman accept that advice?

Mr. Hughes: Not quite. I expect to be told at any moment that I should be as moderate as Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo; that would complete the trio. Anyway, a great deal has happened, and I feel that we should recognise how much was done, remembering those who died, those who lived and the great prospects for Namibia.

We must also reflect that the future depends considerably on us and our good will. It is interesting to note the different perceptions of Africa, and the way in which our own perceptions of that country become lost in time. From about 4 pm on independence day, the rain was teeming down in torrents; most of us Europeans apologised to the Namibians for the fact that it should rain on independence day, but they replied, "It is great: it is a good omen. You have brought us good luck—we are desperate for rain." That, I think, illustrates the difference between us. No matter how well we think that we understand Africa, unless we have lived there for a long period—as I did—we may forget that rain is welcomed.

Namibia—all of it—is a rich country, with great potential. The question is whether that potential can be realised. I had an odd experience. A number of South African and Namibian exiles—I suppose that I could be described as a part-exile—travelled to Namibia. The only way in which we could travel was with South African Airways. We all shuffled reluctantly on to the Frankfurt-Namibia plane, and felt extremely guilty as we sat in a nice hotel gorging ourselves on the South African food and wine that we had spent so many years boycotting and urging others to boycott. It was an odd mixture of pleasure and remorse.

There is a point to this anecdote. Windhoek is a marvellous old German city, beautifully laid out, with wide avenues and streets and lovely houses. One could almost imagine oneself in Utopia. To set ourselves to rights, and to help ourselves to remember the difficulties that the future would entail, we travelled about a mile and a half to the African township of Katatura. Visitors to Katatura see the desperate poverty in which Africans live. I know that this applies to hundreds, if not thousands, of places in southern Africa—and, indeed, South Africa itself—but if an alien from outer space were to ask, "What is this apartheid?", it would know the real and desperate meaning of the word if someone took it from Windhoek to Katatura.

I have spent 35 years campaigning on South Africa—not only for theoretical reasons, although the theory of democracy is important. The campaign has as much to do with people's lives as it has to do with theoretical democracy. We have a tremendous duty to ensure that the spirit of reconciliation that has been abroad before and since independence day, as well as on that day, is not dissipated because we have not done enough to try to resolve the problems.

The two main outstanding issues have already been mentioned, but they need to be reaffirmed. Those issues are Walvis bay—which, for geographical and historical reasons, and because of the United Nations resolutions, is an integral part of Namibia and should be recognised as such by the South African Government—and the enormous debt that has built up in Namibia. President de Klerk, in his valedictory speech—surprisingly well received at the hand-over ceremony on independence day, although a gasp went around the stadium when he spoke of "us Africans"; that set him back a bit—pointed out that South Africa had left Namibia a marvellous infrastructure.

There are many good roads in the country, but they were not built for the good of the Namibians. They were built for the same reasons for which the Romans built the roads here and in Scotland—for the easy mobility of the army. It seems inconceivable that Namibia should be asked to bear the cost of the war machine that kept it down for so long. So I think that the South Africans must do something about the debt.

I had a talk some two months ago with a member of the United States Department of State. We were discussing what President de Klerk might say at the opening of the South African Parliament. He was quite enthusiastic. He believed that President de Klerk would say in his opening speech to Parliament that he was ceding—if that is the right word—Walvis bay and that, if he would not write off the whole debt, he would write off part of it. Many other things were missing from that speech. I do not want to go into that, except to say that nothing was mentioned, so far as I am aware, about these two subjects. It is not good enough, in my view, for hon. Members to say that the European Community should help to pay the debt. I think that the South Africans should pay the debt and we must continue to press them along those lines.

Namibia, during the elections and since it achieved independence, has put the scars behind it. Some are unwilling to put the scars behind them. I raised with SWAPO the issue of detainees, or however one describes them, during the period before independence. They admitted that there were things done on the SWAPO side which they would rather had not been done. There were things that the South Africans did which some South Africans, I believe, would rather had not been done. Some people are unwilling to put the past behind them, but I believe that there is a good chance of all that being set behind them.

The Namibians offer an opportunity to those whites in South Africa who are afraid for the future and afraid that the pace of development in South Africa is too fast. My own view—and I hope that at a later stage we shall have a chance to debate this thoroughly—is that the pace of events in South Africa is still too slow. The people in the townships and elsewhere are getting fractious and hesitant about the pace of developemnt. Therefore, we must make sure that development continues in South Africa. We must tell President de Klerk quite clearly that he should not be mesmerised by events in the Gulf and think that those who are desperately concerned about the Gulf will forget South Africa, the major wrongs that still have to be righted and the way in which democracy must come to South Africa.

I wish this Bill, as I think we all do, a very fair wind. We wish the Namibian people every possible success, every one of them, irrespective of race, creed or colour. We believe that their example in the last 12 months should put South Africa to shame and make South Africans realise that there is a future of great benefit post apartheid for all

the people of South Africa. I hope that it will not be too long before we have a Bill before us that welcomes South Africa back into the Commonwealth where it and its people really belong.

8.52 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): To judge from the number of people who have either overtly or covertly suggested that they might like a trip to Namibia, I imagine that the Government will be getting on as quickly as possible with drawing up their tourist brochure. But I do not think that they will be asking the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) to write it for them, because the picture that she painted of Namibia is not one that I recognise. I may be one of the few people in the Chamber tonight who has paid her fare to go to Namibia. I have visited the Etosha game park, which is one of the wonders of the world, and many other natural history areas of the country. I have also been on a general political tour of the country. To me it is potentially one of the best capitalist development countries in the whole of Africa, and I have visited practically every country in Africa.

For the past 20 years I have run a business dealing with teaching equipment, through which I have had the opportunity and good fortune to talk to the departments of education in almost every country, including Namibia. I know from personal experience that Namibia, manifested by the spirit of the people who live there, has a terrific future as a capitalist country. It has one of the best, finest and most successful uranium mining features, the Rossing mines; there are diamond mining areas; and there are excellent resorts along the coast. It also has, potentially, one of the best fishing industries in the world. The only problem at the moment is that the Namibians do not have a fleet with which to police it and there is a great deal of poaching. But once they get the resources to control that, it will bring them enormous wealth. So that country, perhaps more than any other African country, has the prospect of a bright free-enterprise future.

I am as delighted as are all hon. Members with the Bill and with the multinational nature of the Namibian Parliament. I hope that it remains a multi-party country and does not, like Zambia and some other countries of Africa, go down the road to single-party government, thus frightening away all the capitalist enterprises which are the backbone of its support.

All developing countries have problems of poverty. People in country districts move towards towns such as Windhoek where they set up suburbs which are much less pleasing than people would like them to be. The only way in which we can improve life for those people is by helping in the development of capitalist industries that will increase the wealth of the country and make those people prosperous.

I would like to leave those who bother to read *Hansard* tomorrow with my view that Namibia is a terrific country, with delightful people, wonderful natural history and terrific industrial and commercial potential. I know that many African countries have failed to achieve this, but if it keeps its political act open, with an all-party state, I think Namibia has a wonderful future.

8.56 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): It would be somewhat churlish of me not to join in the general welcome for this Bill and the implications of a new, independent and free Namibia. However, I believe that it needs to be said that, in the spirit of reconciliation shown on both sides of the House, certain things said earlier, particularly by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), were, to say the least, unfortunate and somewhat misinformed and misguided.

I say to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), whose views on South Africa are almost as well known as mine, that had it not been for the cajoling, persuading and constant co-operation with the present South African Government that I and my hon. Friends —in particular, the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner)—have pursued over the years, we might not have been in this position this evening. Carping though he is about this relationship and the discussions over many years of the many and varied problems of South Africa, I suggest to him that it is the influence of British friends, and British friends in the House among others, that has helped South Africa along the road to realisation that the United Nations resolution has to be implemented. Because of people like us, they took that decision. By his constant carping and criticism the hon. Gentleman has, I think, delayed the process—I see the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) shaking his head—in very much the same way as one of his former colleagues, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), did when he was Foreign Secretary, and Mr. Andrew Young, the American ambassador to the United Nations, did in the 1970s. It looked as though a settlement could be reached, but that was scuppered, of course, by Mr. Young and the then Foreign Secretary.

It must be noted that whatever the future of Namibia is to be—obviously, we all wish it well—it is somewhat foolish and naive, particularly as outlined by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley, totally to ignore the obviously old dependence that it had on South Africa and the new dependence that it is bound to have on it as a major trading capital nation of that continent. If misfortune ever struck this country and there was a Labour Government, I hope that the hon. Lady, in her attitude towards that country and to the whole of southern Africa, would perhaps be a little more magnanimous in accepting the reality that South Africa is there and is a major trading partner. The hon. Lady mentioned several other trading nations in and around southern Africa. Many of them are totally dependent on South Africa. Whether that is right or wrong is not the argument. That is a fact and a reality which it is foolish to ignore. Namibia will certainly be economically dependent in many ways on South Africa and the South African market.

It is a pity that on a day when our Prime Minister recognised, after President de Klerk's remarkable speech last Friday, that sanctions should be lifted fast, there is still talk in this place, particularly among Opposition Members —although some of them are beginning to change their ways—that we should continue to impose trading sanctions. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North, for whose views on southern African affairs I have the greatest respect, was right to say that South Africa should take

[Mr. John Carlisle]

some responsibility for Namibia's debt. A buoyant South African economy would be able to help to pay that debt if sanctions were withdrawn.

South Africa's attitude to the Walvis bay issue is not cast in concrete. It is, as it was in the past, an enormous asset to South Africa. It will also be an enormous asset to the region. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) referred to the expertise that will be needed to improve Namibia's fishing industry. Expertise will also be required if Namibia is to improve its technology. South African co-operation will almost certainly be needed. The future of Walvis bay must be settled by means of partnership and co-operation between the two countries rather than by the complete handing over of that facility.

So far, so good. Multi-party democracy is working. We applaud that. The majority of Namibians have put behind them the old bitterness which, regrettably, was evident in the speech of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley. All that has gone. There is a new spirit in the country. I have not accepted a free trip to Namibia, although I have accepted several to South Africa. I have been invited several times to Namibia, particularly for sporting events. It is a country that I should certainly like to visit one day. I do not speak with any particular bias. If the tone set by certain Opposition Members—with some honourable exceptions—were to continue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay warned, the likelihood is that democracy in Namibia will not remain as it is but will, sadly, go the way of democracy in so many other countries in southern Africa.

Of course, we welcome the Bill. I wish Namibia a fair wind in the exciting times that lie ahead. As the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said, I hope that one day we shall debate a similar motion on South Africa.

9.2 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): History will now be able to record the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton (Mr. Carlisle), together with the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), Trevor Huddleston and many others as having invited South Africa to do what eventually it got around to doing. How good it would have been if South Africa had listened to my hon. Friend at the time that the United Nations said that South Africa should obey the terms of the mandate and leave Namibia.

The advantage of one person, one vote and a flexible economic process can deliver great benefits. First, it delivers people from war. In far too many countries people are still denied the vote, or their vote is not carried into effect.

I should like Burma to beat South Africa back into the Commonwealth. Burma gained its independence but did not join the Commonwealth. Burma had an election but the results have not been implemented.

We ought to learn the lessons of Zimbabwe and Namibia. I am sure that they will be learnt in South Africa—I hope as soon as possible. They are that to give a person the vote should lead to that vote being used, to competing candidates and, preferably, to competing parties. The Commonwealth countries have more competing candidates than most other countries in the world, though not always with competing parties. Then there would be less starvation, fewer deaths and more people who were willing to accept that resignation or retirement is honourable, having led their country, rather than waiting until, having formed a dynasty, they are forced out at the point of a gun.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Tell that to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

Mr. Bottomley: I was just about to come to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). At the beginning of her term as Prime Minister we saw the advent of freedom for Zimbabwe. That was a great triumph for her and for Lord Carrington, which I do not think anyone else could have pulled off. A great deal of help was forthcoming from within the Commonwealth also.

At the Lusaka Heads of Government meeting the Prime Minister of Australia, the Prime Minister of Jamaica and, I suspect, the Queen—of course, I am not supposed to bring the monarch into a political discussion—combined to help bring about the Lancaster house conference. That conference and the persistence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley produced a result far better than anyone had expected. Towards the end of my right hon. Friend's term as Prime Minister, Namibia became independent. When the 30-year rule has been satisfied, we may find out that some communication between my right hon. Friend and the South Africans had as much influence as did the communications from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle).

If I were to offer a suggestion for the "Thatcher foundation", it would be that it should be dedicated to trying to spread democracy round the world. The reputation of the Commonwealth and of other bodies for encouraging people to get away from subjugation to minority groups could be a great advantage, as we have seen in places like Iraq, where the richness of the ruler contrasts with the poverty of the ruled.

I suspect that one could use that advantage in terms of flexible economic systems and flexible fiscal systems. My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley may go down in history as one of the people who helped to carry through a change such as we have seen in fits and starts since the war.

Let me explain why I am speaking for the second time in two days. When I was first elected to this House—in 1975—the leader of the Conservative party asked me what subjects I was interested in. I replied that two of the things I was interested in were family policy and southern Africa. It struck me that the Conservatives ought to be making sure that people like Ian Smith and others in southern Africa did not think that the Tories supported white-minority rule. It would be well that people should realise that that sort of approach was morally wrong and eventually a military loser.

Many Tory Members should pay tribute to people like the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North who has consistently pointed out how wrong apartheid is. I do not go along with all that the anti-apartheid people have stood for. However, that is a detail. I am thinking of the symbolism of opposition to apartheid. I am thinking of the ability to have been to Friends house on the Euston road and heard very significant speeches by ANC and SWAPO leaders and by people from various Zimbabwe opposition parties, often in exile.

The audiences at such meetings were British, but not those who throw sticks at anti-poll-tax demonstrations in Trafalgar square. I am referring to people who have shown a consistent interest in human rights and who believe that what we think is good for us is good for people in other countries also. Namibia's joining the Commonwealth is an illustration of the fact that that approach is right.

In the past I have been a patron of the defence aid fund for most of my years in this House. Although I did not do as much as I ought to have done, I can say that help for people who have been imprisoned, people who have no one else to speak for them, is important. We should not be dealing just with the big questions like Walvis bay; we ought to be asking, "What can we do to provide the help that is needed by ordinary individuals suffering oppression?"

I hope that this country will continue to provide aid. This may be a matter for another debate, but I have to say that we must continue to try to increase this country's contribution towards 0·7 per cent. Perhaps we could do that and, at the same time, create greater trust in South Africa by helping to relieve Namibia of its debts.

I hope that that will result in a rise in the public expenditure line for the Foreign Office, including the ODA. I hope that by the time those debts are written off we shall have moved towards the 0·7 per cent. Sadly, in recent years the trend has been in the opposite direction.

There are several ways in which we could deal with the voluntary agencies. I hope on another occasion to be able to deal with the work of VSO. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), who is a returned volunteer, is not present, so I shall leave that subject for the time being. We can favour providing assistance for, and giving prominence to, such projects as the Ranfurley library scheme, which was doing work in Namibia when I was there in the early 1980s. We might also recognise that the movement towards English in Namibia began not on independence but when the people of Namibia revolted against the Afrikaans language in the early 1980s. Whatever one may want to say about the South African defence forces, they tried to help with the teaching of English.

As we move into what I suspect might be called a recession, we might find ways of getting people with technical and English skills into Namibia on a short-term basis, because their knowledge and skills will be of much value in the next few months and years.

I want to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North by not going back into the atrocities and tragedies which were Namibia's lot and which spread into Angola. I should like to mention the role of the Namibian Council of Churches and Namibian National Front during the years of agony in Namibia. The people stuck in the middle, who were signed up not with SWAPO—that was not such a bad body as many led us to believe—but with the Namibian Council of Churches and the Namibian National Front, were squeezed from both sides. I pay tribute to the dignity and honourable way in which many of them behaved for such a long time.

The Lutheran churches, and most of the other churches, came out of the years towards independence with honour. Others were in contact with them, and I should not want the debate to pass without again paying tribute to the Catholic Institute for International Relations. Its briefings are a model of the information that such organisations can offer. How nice it was that the European Community sent as its representative to Windhoek someone who had worked in the Catholic Institute for International Relations. I am pleased that the European Commission has decided to move that person on to South Africa.

Independence for Namibia shows the way forward for South Africa. The strong will learn from the weak, which will be important for southern Africa and, I hope, will spread through the middle of Africa and central Africa as other countries learn that food must be produced, that one must get the best from people and that that cannot be achieved with out-of-date ideologies. Being practical is one of the lessons that SWAPO can offer.

In the early 1980s, at about the time of independence for Zimbabwe, we had in Lusaka one of the strongest high commissions, in terms of dedication and competence of its staff, which was led by Sir John Johnson. When I visited the country, he made it possible for me to go to parties with the Pan-African Congress, the ANC and at the United Nations institute for Namibia, which provided some link and showed that Members of Parliament are interested in the rights and wrongs; the facts rather than the fantasies.

More hon. Members should visit countries that are holding elections, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner), who attended the Namibian elections, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and others. If we can get into the habit of sharing each other's election processes, we shall become more knowledgeable and more of us will be able to appeal through a network of politicians around the world so that few people's agonies go unrecognised by others.

We rely on contacts and on facts. That is where the work of the CIIR and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office matters. It is often necessary to have dirty hands. It is not always easy for a Minister, especially a Conservative Minister, to tell the House what the truth is. One or two Ministers for Sport have become ex-Ministers for Sport because of the South African sports issue. Not all of us can feel pride about our lack of support for Ministers at times when it might have been more useful.

The dramatic change in South Africa must be recognised. It is not happening fully yet. We have not heard explicitly about one person, one vote, or when that will come, but if we do not provide more of a reward I suspect that a provincial caucus in the Transvaal National party may seriously delay free and full elections in South Africa. That is why I argue for the dropping of unimportant sanctions. Sporting sanctions should be reconsidered. I hope that the governing bodies internationally will do that.

We can go on to see prosperity in Namibia. It will not be perfect but it will be much better than anything else that could have happened. I hope that what is happening there will spread into South Africa itself.

The point in the Bill that matters most to the House is the admission of Namibia to the Commonwealth. People are willing to work together and to learn together. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd), governor of the Commonwealth Institute said, they are learning from each other. We have a great deal to offer and we have a great deal to learn as well.

I make a penultimate plea. There is a country beyond Burma which has not yet joined the Commonwealth. I

[Mr. Bottomley]

look on the United States as becoming the 53rd country because it has not bothered to join the rest who have been affected by our influence.

My more local plea is that all schools in Eltham, my constituency, and every constituency should use the Commonwealth Institute. It is an unusual place which can provide much meaning to the history of the last 50 years or, indeed, the last 250 years. It will give children an idea that they are citizens of the world, something which we tend to forget in our education system.

9.15 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The number and the range of contributions to the debate, including the remarkable speech by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), indicate clearly to me that our decision to press for the debate to be held on the Floor of the House rather than in Committee was justified. I have learnt a great deal. For example, I have learnt from the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) that the real division is between those who have been to Namibia and those who want to go, and from the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) of a division even within those who have gone, between those whose trips were paid for by various institutions and those who have gone with business expenses. Certainly she gave a very good Tory plug for the new Namibia.

I hope that the Overseas Development Administration will consider tourism as a major area for foreign exchange for the new country, with the Etosha pan, with the savage scenery, with the marvellous restaurants in Windhoek itself, with the Skeleton coast and with the marvellous range of landscapes——

Mrs. Gorman: And the wild animals.

Mr. Anderson —and, indeed, the wild animals, which are all part of Namibia.

This has been an excellent debate, technical in form because it is a relatively small, technical Bill, but it has been an opportunity for hon. Members of all parties to give a collective blessing to the new Namibia and an opportunity too to review the role which we in Britain, and Britain as part of the Commonwealth, can play in responding to the needs of the new Namibia.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said so well, reconciliation is part of the recent history of Namibia. Those of us who have been brought up in the European tradition stand amazed at the readiness of people in southern Africa to take part in reconciliation. Experience in Zimbabwe shows that people who were imprisoned for long years during the independence struggle were willing to work together; one sees equal willingness in Namibia. I recall, as did the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd), the Namibian delegation at the CPA conference last October, led by the Deputy Speaker, Dr. Kameeta. The fact that it was a mixed party delegation boded well for knitting together and national reconciliation within Namibia.

There has been a proper welcome to Namibia as the 50th member of the Commonwealth, and, happily, the tenth member of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference. The hon. Members for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) and for Hereford referred to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The association has much to offer, such as seminars and visits —not, I hope, merely from a British perspective. The neighbouring African countries, especially Botswana, which is a model of democracy, can play a significant role as models and friends to the newly emerging, newly independent Namibia.

Today, I discussed with the Commonwealth secretariat its own enhanced programme of technical assistance for Namibia. We are pleased that the British Government and the Overseas Development Administration have pledged their full proportion of support to that enhanced programme of technical co-operation under the auspices of the Commonwealth secretariat.

My first visit to Namibia in 1985 was sponsored by the Council of Churches of Namibia. The churches there saw their role as similar to that of the churches in Poland at the time—as a beacon of light and as a progressive opposition to a totalitarian, authoritarian oppressor. They were able to keep alight the hopes of the people of Namibia at a very difficult time.

With the passing of Security Council resolution 435 in 1978, hopes were raised, yet our overriding impression in 1985 was of a sense of gloom and despair, and of frustration at the lack of progress since the 1978 resolution, at the collusion between the United States and South Africa in terms of linkage and at the fear of the churches and others that the independence promised in 1978 was receding into an ever-distant future.

Today, I learned of the sterling role played by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) in that independence process. I confess that I was unaware of the persuation that he brought to bear on the powers that be in South Africa. When we come to rewrite the history books on the motive behind the independence of Namibia, we shall not think of the battle of Cuito Canavale, of the effect of sanctions or of the internal economic pressures on South Africa. They can be assigned to a footnote in the history books. We shall think of the pressures applied by the progressive hon. Member for Luton, North when we recall our history.

I revisited Namibia in August 1989 and saw the return of the exiles. That visit was made under the auspices of the West European Parliamentarians for Action against Apartheid which has had a particularly close interest in Namibia. I had the honour to be its senior vice-president. We organised a conference in November of last year on aid and co-operation with the new Namibia, and we look forward to being in Windhoek in April.

In November 1989, I also had the privilege to be part of a three-person Inter-Parliamentary Union team monitoring the election. We were delighted to see the eagerness of the people of Namibia for democracy, as were other hon. Members who have been there. I recall being woken at dawn with a Pakistani senator, Javed Jabbar, and seeing a trail of people already queueing, eager to vote in that election, which we did not hesitate to confirm as free and fair. It has indeed been a success story.

From the time of the 1978 resolution, and indeed before, Namibia has been the child of the international community. Our task now is to ensure that the international community—including Britain, the Commonwealth and the European Community—respond properly so that democracy can flourish.

There were high expectations at the time of independence, but for many Namibians, such as

subsistence farmers, democracy and expectations will mean a new waterhole and the provision of drinking water and aid—not so much the grand gestures, but the micro-projects that bring proper relief to villages in those areas. I hope that the ODA will look properly at those matters and will try to harness the enormous skills in this country, in particular the skills of some professional people who have taken early retirement, such as doctors, engineers and others, and look again at educational institutions in the United Kingdom that can twin with appropriate schools in Namibia, as education has properly been stressed as the great underpinning of the needs of the new Namibia.

In some ways, independence came at a difficult time, because Africa has been somewhat marginalised in aid terms. The counter attractions of east and central Europe, the retreat from lending by the private banks, and now the Gulf war are bound to affect the economy of the country, which has no indigenous oil resources. However, there is much in favour of Namibia. I remind the House of the conclusions of the International Monetary Fund survey in January this year, which was extremely optimistic about the future, and which stated:

"Overall, Namibia is well placed for economic development, in part because of the extensive infrastructure that it has inherited. The nation also has a strong resource base that offers substantial economic potential. The lifting of economic sanctions after Namibia became independent also provides important new growth opportunities. At the same time, prudent fiscal policies and policies conducive to boosting investment will be critical to the nation's aim of reactivating its economy."

I hope that that will be reflected in the current three-day seminar on private sector investment in that country.

I have mentioned national reconciliation. Obviously, there is also the need for external assistance if democracy is to flourish and if the grand human rights provisions in the constitution, which go far beyond that which is basic in international conventions, are able properly to be implemented. The economy of Namibia is still very skewed. There is an enormous disproportion in income, which must make democracy in the western sense extremely difficult. For example, the whites, who comprise 5 per cent. of the population, have a personal gross domestic product of about $16,500. Non-whites in economic urban sectors have a personal GDP of about $750 per annum, and most subsistence farmers have an annual gross domestic product of about $85. That gives some idea of the problems and disparities in trying to provide adequate democracy in a developing country in which there are such gross disproportions in income.

I hope that we shall do what we can to bring together what is now in one country the first and third worlds, side by side. The problems, as related to me by Namibian friends, include the fact that the country is still largely relying on the old pre-independence administrative personnel who have constitutional guarantees to remain. The new Namibia needs enormous training and help in administration. Is the Minister for Overseas Development satisfied with the adequacy of aid from external donors? Is the co-ordination adequate?

On education, 60 per cent. of the people are illiterate. The problem of English language teaching has already been mentioned, but it has repercussions in two sectors. First, staff in the current teacher force are mostly under-trained for its needs. There must be continuous in-service training for the teacher force. Secondly, there is the problem that the young people coming into education do not speak English. That poses the problem of deciding when they should begin to learn the English language. I trust that, in view of our special contribution, we shall look into that. The British Council published a report in April 1989 on the problems of Namibian education. I fear that the British Government have been somewhat slow off the starting block, but I look forward to a major contribution in that sector, particularly in subjects such as maths, which is affected by the legacy of apartheid when black pupils were assigned a low status.

It was not only expenditure on the road infrastructure which led to Namibia's indebtedness, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North suggested. The cause was also the apartheid education structure, which had 11 administrations and the duplication of administration and teaching effort which derived from it.

Fishing has been mentioned this evening. I understand that the Government are awaiting a response from the Namibian authorities. Fishing is basic to the economy. It is necessary to patrol the 200-mile zone and enforce the fishing regulations. I am told that Spanish vessels, for example, are particularly notorious for entering the waters, and Namibia needs assistance in that matter.

Security Council resolution 432, which our Government supported, calls for the early reintegration of Walvis bay into Namibia. Yet we are now a year on from independence and there has been no progress. The Government talk of a softly, softly approach. It would be helpful to know what the pressures are, and how intense and at what level they are being exerted.

What are the prospects? *The Namibian* of 27 January this year said that the Afrikaans press in South Africa had suggested that there should be some Hong Kong-type solution or that there should be some joint administration between the Namibians and the South Africans. It is claimed that in a weekly Afrikaans newspaper Pik Botha said that there was no possibility of reintegration of Walvis bay into Namibia in the near future. That may or may not be an exact quotation, but it would be helpful to know from the Government whether they believe that there is a real threat from the South African authorities.

To turn to the broader political considerations, clearly the whole sub-region of southern Africa has a stake in Namibia's success. Will it be a negative or a positive model? I am sure that if independence had gone wrong, if the whites had been driven out of Namibia, and if there had been an economic disaster, Namibia would have been headline news in Britain and elsewhere. Part of the success story is that Namibia has not been in the headlines. Namibians have got on with the job of building their new country. It has been a model of prudent nation-building for South Africa and anyone else who cares to examine it.

Our Namibian friends and Commonwealth colleagues should be assured that there is enormous cross-party good will in Britain. We should all be ready to respond sensitively and in appropriate measure to the developing needs of our newly independent country.

9.35 pm

Mrs. Chalker: With the leave of the House, I will respond to what hon. Members will agree has been an excellent debate. We may not have agreed 100 per cent. with everything that has been said from either side, but there has been a greater degree of unanimity, for all the

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right reasons, in this debate than I can recall seeing for a long time. That has been a most welcome aspect of our proceedings because not only has it been an ambition of mine to see the end of apartheid while I was serving in the Foreign Office, but I know that it has been the lifetime work of many hon. Members.

For many years, hon. Members on both sides have believed that apartheid was wrong and should go as soon as possible. I include among those my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who said so, sometimes defiantly, and who worked to ensure that changes would come about. I refer, of course, to the sort of changes that were heralded in an outstanding speech at the opening of the South African Parliament last Friday by President de Klerk.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who has worked assiduously for Namibian independence, said that the United Nations role had been much more than monitoring, and he was right. The United Kingdom played a major role in the UNTAG performance, which was perhaps towards the end of the process. At first, the western contact group drew up the settlement plan, and the United Nations then came into its role. I have a personal friend who worked on that group back in the 1970s. I am sure that she and many like her longed for that day in March last year, which at long last came.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): There has been an omission from the debate. Credit should be paid to the late Bernot Carlsson for the part he played in the process. I hope that the right hon. Lady will agree about that and will put the record right.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman gives me new information, and I am sure he is right. Had he been trying to catch me out, he would have sat on the Opposition Front Bench to make that comment. I gladly join him in paying that tribute, although there are many, too numerous to mention, to whom tribute should be paid.

The major contribution that we were able to make to UNTAG was timely, and I refer not only to our £17 million financial contribution. It was, as a Namibian told me last week, what people on the ground did in the signals unit that we sent to Namibia. There were 150 people—149 men and one woman—55 election monitors and a team of fingerprint experts. They were praised not only for the work that they went to Namibia to do but for the extra that they gave in the whole process leading up to independence.

Independence has succeeded and tonight we are discussing the Bill which extends the Commonwealth provisions to Namibia. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), my hon. Friends and Opposition Members referred in particular to the two outstanding problems that must be tackled—Walvis bay and debt repayment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) said, rightly, that discussions are proceeding between the Governments of Namibia and of the Republic of South Africa about Walvis bay. Those discussions have been on a sensible, low-key, bilateral basis and we have not sought to play a role in them. We have asked what I hope have been helpful questions and made points, but we have not played a direct role. Such a role is not ours to play.

Resolution 432 talked about early reintegration, and that we fully support. But in wishing to see that occur, we must proceed by way of encouragement. I believe that prospects exist for a solution. The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) questioned me about that. I shall check on the quotation that he said was attributed to the South African Foreign Minister when I am in South Africa next week visiting projects there. We are keen to see the problem resolved, as I believe are many members of the South African Government. There must be sensible discussions about all the elements of Walvis bay and, until that problem is resolved, I well understand that people will feel that Namibia's complete independence has not been achieved.

It is interesting to note that the Namibian Government have said that they accept the inherited debt as a sovereign obligation. Throughout the time that I have been dealing with the matter, I have been impressed by the number of times members of the Namibian Government and other Namibians have told me how determined that country is to stand on its own feet—that includes dealing with its debt. It has provided, in its 1990 budget, for servicing the debt and for repayment of it, but I am sure that the Namibians, who are fully prepared to negotiate with South Africa over the debt that they inherited from the former South African Administration, will find ready listeners in the international community and in South Africa in dealing with this. We must work on tackling that problem.

None of Namibia's requirements, with a new Government facing a difficult challenge, will succeed unless Namibia achieves growth. Namibia wants to create growth for itself and it wants to achieve that through investment. That is why I was particularly pleased last Friday to sign, on behalf of the Commonwealth Development Corporation, and with the chairman of the National Planning Commission, Dr. "Z", the agreement for the CDC to invest in Namibia. We signed that code because we wanted to give the CDC the freedom to invest in the sort of projects that everyone knows will bring employment and prosperity to the people of Namibia. It was the first of its kind for Namibia. As the hon. Member for Swansea, East remarked, an investment seminar began yesterday that will attract many people to invest in a country that wants to thrive by its own efforts—investment is necessary for that.

I was asked during the debate about other ways in which Namibia could get itself on its feet. Tourism is one. I was most impressed by the way in which Namibia, hosting SADCC for the first time since it became a member, put up displays in the hall, not only of the places that one might expect to see and of wild animals in the bush, but of the quite fantastic Skeleton coast. Without wishing to sound like a travel agent for Namibia, I can say that there will be plenty for all to enjoy in a country that welcomes visitors and makes them happy while they are there. Tourism is, therefore, an industry from which perhaps the CDC and certainly others will find a ready return on investment.

Education is a fundamental aspect of our training programme, not only in English, but in other subjects, too. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley referred to two specialists in the Ministry of Education. I assure her that that is not all that we are doing. The Namibian Government asked us to focus on English language education and wanted the advisers in the Ministry of Education. This year we are also granting 21 awards for

English teachers and we shall be doing more next year. We are helping with education planning, teacher training, the reform of the examination system, and the higher education commission. We have been training students at Moray house and Selly Oak college in this country. We are now considering what to do with the resources to fit in with the Namibian Government's plans. One should never forget that they have inherited 11 different education systems which have to be bound together to form just one. That is a major problem to tackle.

I have arranged that the ODA's chief education adviser will lead the sector mission to Namibia planned for April this year to programme the further educational assistance.

Finally, in this current financial year we are spending approaching £1 million on more than 140 training awards for Namibians studying in Britain. Therefore, a great deal is already being done in the education sector.

Mr. Anderson: The Minister may be aware that, in addition to that which is being done formally by the British Government, a number of private agencies are equally involved. Moray house has been mentioned and Sheena Johnston is currently in Namibia preparing a report on pre-school education. There is a great range of private and public effort in this area.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my remarks about the private educational effort. I could fill the remaining 15 minutes of the debate talking about education in Namibia and some of the ways in which different groups are trying to meet the complicated educational needs of the increasing young population there.

I also pay tribute to the work of the British Council in Namibia which the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) mentioned and which I visited on Friday. It has a real role to play which is increasing fast. I am sure that its contribution will be second to none in helping Namibians to broaden their experience of the English language, through culture and music in particular, and in other ways which will add to their life. Many native languages are spoken in that country and the binding nature of the English language, through culture and music, is important.

There are many other ways in which we wish to help Namibia. We already have the police training programme and the public service reforms which I have mentioned. We are helping, through Christian Aid, some projects run by the repatriation, resettlement and reconstruction committee which helps the returnees to reintegrate into Namibian life.

At the end of last year we had a health identification mission in Namibia and we shall be getting involved in primary health care training, working with Oxfam and the CIIR. We are currently at the design stage.

There is no doubt that there are other areas in which we need to assist. We have already financed an initial study on fisheries management to which I referred briefly yesterday in answer to the hon. Member for Burnley. We have offered to provide further assistance in fisheries, but we are awaiting a response from the Namibian Government. I asked them last week to let us know kow that consideration was proceeding.

We are considering particular opportunities to assist the agricultural sector. I hope to arrange a further visit by an agriculture expert to take that forward in the next couple of months.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley rather pooh-poohed the fact that we must send people to Namibia to find out what needs to be done, but to meet the requirements and wishes of the Namibian Government much consultation is needed. By the end of March we shall have spent £2 million during the first year of the programme. We have more to do, but we have tried to lay the foundation for each of the projects thoroughly by sending our advisers out, discussing with the Government of Namibia and now pushing projects forward through the national planning commission. That commission will need help from us, but much basic training is needed on agriculture methodology if the people, particularly those in the northern part of Ovamboland, are to realise their ambition—to get a secure living from the land.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East was right about the importance of irrigation and we are looking with the Namibians at their irrigation needs. I cannot yet tell the House whether that will result in projects, but we have told the Namibian Government that we are ready to help. In that way, we may do some good work in irrigation and agriculture for 1·6 million people.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley asked about a Community fisheries agreement with Namibia. We have lent our weight to such a proposal, but have only just received the Commission's first draft. Nevertheless, we shall give it urgent consideration. Namibia's fisheries programme is of great importance because it will provide a major source of income, as long as the fish are not stolen. Devising the fisheries protection area for the Namibian coast will be complicated, and the area will then need the policing that it has not enjoyed until now. The income that Namibia will derive from that sector will be enhanced once a fisheries agreement is reached with the European Community.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley suggested that £10 million of funding over three years is not enough. It is easy to make such a comment, but also inaccurate. Namibia is still assessing its own priorities. We are willing to spend money there, because we want to help, but there is no way that we will impose upon Namibia assistance that it does not want, or ideas and priorities of our own. Namibia must decide its own priorities and devise its own ideas. We will help, but we must not impose our own concepts on that country. That is why our programme of assistance must be given a proper basis and be properly organised.

Given the size and spread of Namibia's population, we must give careful thought to how best to spend money. It would not be sensible, in view of the scattered population, to build schools across the country—but it would be sensible to invest in educational broadcasting, which would cover areas that teachers cannot normally reach. That £10 million will be well spent.

The hon. Lady referred also to a reduction in European Community aid for the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference, but she probably has not studied the figures in detail. In fact, it was at the SADCC that I met so many Namibians last week, both at the conference and in their own offices. A larger element of funds for regional projects has been kept in reserve by the Community for SADCC. The director-general of DGVIII was present at that conference and there were constructive

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discussions with the national planning commission and with European Commission representatives about how Namibia wants to spend the resources available to it. There is also a special budget line, in addition to the funds available from the European development fund.

It is important to ensure the most efficient use of regional funds. There is no intention to downgrade the importance of SADCC in Community spending, and certainly not when that spending relates to the newest member of both SADCC and the Commonwealth.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley referred to the fourth Lomé convention. The order that allows the United Kingdom to ratify that measure was laid before the House last month and no doubt we will debate it soon. We cannot sign the convention before the House gives its approval. I would have been quite wrong to do otherwise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) made a very interesting speech tonight, which had breadth, depth and vision. One aspect of his speech which struck me was what he said about the importance of developing democracy. Namibia gives us a new opportunity. Democracy is about people's lives, as is the development of Namibia.

While I was in Namibia last week I studied some of the Namibian Government's undertakings and I was interested to find out how they were working forward under the independence constitution. The Namibian Government have begun work on devising boundaries for regional and local government. They have appointed a commission to determine constituencies for future regional and national elections, and an Overseas Development Administration finance adviser has assisted the commission.

The regions will elect representatives to a second Chamber of the National Assembly during 1991 or 1992 and the elected representatives will then replace the 13 temporary regional commissioners, who have been appointed by the Government. This is a good development in the process of democracy and one which other countries, inside and outside the Commonwealth, that are looking for greater democracy would do well to copy.

During the debate I was asked about human rights, which are an essential part of the democracy which Namibia is seeking to achieve. That is why we have made it clear, during police training given in Namibia, that all police forces should operate on the basis of full respect for human rights and the rule of law. That is a basic objective of all our police training programmes throughout Africa and especially with the Namibian police.

We have had a good debate tonight, and it has also been interesting and thoughtful. Namibia is a most welcome new member of the Commonwealth. It is seeking to overcome some enormous problems, has to face serious financial problems, and has a large bureaucracy which, as it freely admits, is not efficient. We are seeking to help Namibia to face those problems and deal with them. That is why a permanent secretary from the former Department of Health and Social Security—now retired—has spent a considerable time helping to achieve the civil service reforms which Namibia needs if it is to have the sound independence that it is seeking.

From all that I have seen and heard about the newest member of the Commonwealth, I am confident that it is working its way towards a truly successful end to the long process of independence. We wish Namibia well and I hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading tonight and allow it to proceed swiftly on to the statute book so that Namibia, our 50th member of the Commonwealth, is fully covered by all the provisions which our law should provide for it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Wood.]*

Committee tomorrow.

European Standing Committee A

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That at the meeting of European Standing Committee A on Wednesday 6th February, the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), so far as they relate to the adjournment of the committee at One o'clock, shall not apply.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

9.58 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In this wonderful democratic system, we have two minutes in which to discuss a vital constitutional issue. Tomorrow, the Standing Committee dealing with European instruments will be given time to discuss a vital milk quota agreement which the Government say is damaging the country, and which they have said that they will fight all the way. Is it sensible or tolerable to consider the motion to extend the sitting, given that the issue was settled yesterday in Brussels? We, the members of the Committee, have for two days been studying an issue that has already been agreed.

Let me ask a second question. How can it make sense for us to agree to discuss a motion to congratulate the Government on opposing a proposal to which, yesterday, they agreed without discussion? Thirdly, will you, Mr. Speaker, look at the motion passed by the House of Commons on 24 October, which stated that if a Minister agrees to an issue without its being considered by the Standing Committee he must come to the House and explain why at the earliest opportunity?

Sadly, this is yet another sign—we have had two such signs already—of the Government's treating European Community legislation with contempt——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL (ROAD TRANSPORT) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Radioactive Material (Road Transport) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any sums required by the Secretary of State for making payments by way of remuneration, allowances or otherwise to inspectors appointed by him under the Act; and

(2) any other expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the provisions of the Act. —*[Mr. Wood.]*

Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Bill *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I know, Mr. Speaker, that you would be saddened if money resolutions such as this went through on the nod, with no contribution from the Floor of the House. I shall be brief, however. This useful Bill—promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds); the constituency used to be called Smethwick—is minor but important. It provides local authorities with moneys to help finance the enforcement of existing legislation to prevent children under 16 from purchasing cigarettes, and to ensure that those who break up cigarette packets and sell the cigarettes singly to children of that age are prosecuted. This is a means of enforcing the law to stop children from embarking on the disastrous smoking habit that loses us so many lives each year.

The Bill is modest. It does not, for example, tackle the problem of sporting events being used to advertise smoking materials, as many are: tobacco companies trespass their way on to our television screens, although the advertising has received no direct finance and, indeed, smoking advertising has been banned on television.

I welcome the money resolution. As I said when we debated the Bill on the first Friday of the Session for private Members' Bills, local authorities need adequate financing to ensure that local government officers in, for example, Bradford—a local authority that is trying to provide services in the face of considerable difficulties, given its limited central Government grant—have the additional resources that the Bill will require. They are naturally keen to enforce such legislation.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): And Bolsover.

Mr. Cryer: Bolsover, like many other areas, will require those additional facilities for the benefit of the community.

10.4 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I understood that the money resolution would go through on the nod, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has said a few words, let me do so as well. I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), who cannot be here, despite his obvious interest in the matter. As one of the Bill's sponsors, let me register my strong support for its objectives; it is a vital measure which could save the lives of many young people.

In 1986, I presented a similar Bill, the Protection of Children (Tobacco) Bill. Sadly, it did not go as far as we hoped to protect young people from this poisonous menace. I welcome the money resolution, which will, I hope, ensure that my hon. Friend's Bill will be more effective.

Question put and agreed to.

Miscarriage and Stillbirth

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

10.5 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I am most grateful for the opportunity to raise this very distressing subject in the House this evening. I am grateful to the Table Office for helping me with the wording of this motion. It says "women suffering miscarriages and stillbirths", and that is exactly what women do.

First, I would like to acknowledge the help that I have received in preparing for this debate from Christine Moulder, who has written a book on miscarriage, and also from the Miscarriage Association.

I want to kick off with one or two definitions. Doctors call all miscarriages "spontaneous abortions"—very different from induced abortions. "Miscarriage", in the present context, is the spontaneous loss of a foetus and stillbirth is the loss of a baby over 28 weeks.

I am very well aware that there are some unwanted pregnancies and that, with these women, a miscarriage can often come as a blessed relief. I realise that, but I do not wish to touch any further on that particular aspect tonight. So why raise this subject at all?

Miscarriage is astonishingly common. At least 30 per cent. of pregnant women experience the loss of a conceived baby before the seventh month of pregnancy. That is hundreds of thousands of babies. This is bad enough, but there is massive bitterness and anger among women who miscarry. Why is this? There are two main reasons.

First, the whole subject seems to be taboo, and where there is silence there is ignorance. I do not want to turn miscarriage into something suitable for gossip on social occasions; it is far too important a subject for that. But everyone in this country will have a friend, a relative or a wife who has miscarried and it is much better to talk about it with sympathy and understanding than to try to sweep

The second reason is the attitude of some in the medical profession. It is most certainly not my aim to take a swipe at the medical profession in general terms. But there are far too many instances of neglect, indifference and sometimes downright cruelty. I quote some comments from women who have had miscarriages on the treatment they received at the hands of the medical profession:

"Doctors don't care. They turn you out of hospital and don't even bother to talk to you."

This is a comment from a woman who miscarried at 12 weeks:

"I saw the foetus and kept it in a dish for the doctor to see. He glanced at it to see that I had had a complete miscarriage than he casually flushed it down the loo. Life is absolute hell. I feel hurt, angry and completely in the dark. If anyone else says, 'Never mind, you can have another', or, 'It's natures way of telling you something was wrong with the baby', I shall scream!"

Another women said:

"Why didn't any doctor bother to tell me what to do when I had a miscarriage? Why did no one warn me I might haemorrhage? How was I to know the dangers?"

Yet another wrote:

"It happened 17 years ago, but I have never got over it. The depression lasted years and nearly broke up my marriage. All because no one talked to me about it."

Finally, perhaps the most harrowing story of all:

"The consultant was sweet. My own doctor was superb. But the staff at the hospital were horrible. They said, 'You haven't really lost a baby. It was nothing much at this stage. Why are you making so much fuss?' I had five hours of excruciating pain, much worse than childbirth, then no one talked to me or told me a thing. I didn't know what they had done with the dead baby—thrown it in the incinerator, I suppose. Then they wheeled me down the main ward through all the happy mothers holding their new babies. A girl in the next bed was there for an abortion. She asked me, 'Are you here to get rid of yours?' If I had been able to get off the trolley, I would have dragged her out of bed and knocked her down."

From all this one can only assume that there are too many members of the medical profession who see miscarriage simply as just another physical condition that needs such-and-such treatment. That is a very grave misjudgment. What a woman who has had a miscarriage has suffered is a bereavement, for which grief and mourning are entirely appropriate.

In a recent survey members of the Miscarriage Association revealed that 80 per cent. of them were left feeling angry and bitter by their experiences. Of those, no fewer than 66 per cent. thought that the medical treatment that they had had was inadequate, even poor. These women complained that they received no information, no counselling and no advice. Often after a miscarriage a woman goes home to relatives who, though well meaning, carefully avoid the subject, just at the time when she most needs to talk about it.

So what is to be done? I should like to put the following six suggestions to the Minister. The first is pre-natal care. When women first go to see their general practitioner at the start of a pregnancy they should be told about the possibility of a miscarriage, what it is and what happens. I realise very well that there will be women who at the start of a pregnancy are very happy and that they will not want to hear about even the possibility of a miscarriage. Nevertheless, I feel that they should be told about it.

My second suggestion relates to scans. Access to scans needs to be improved, especially in an emergency. That includes weekends. We all know that emergencies almost always arise at weekends, or at bank holidays or in the middle of the night. Scan operators should be allowed to tell their patients the results as soon as possible, not hours later when the information often has to be relayed through doctors and consultants back to the woman concerned.

My third suggestion concerns disposal arrangements —a very sensitive issue. The loss should be treated with respect and dignity, not just flushed down the lavatory or consigned to the incinerator with the rest of the hospital waste. This is not a waste product.

Fourthly, there is the question of follow-up care. Many women are sent away from hospital without a single word of explanation or comfort. What came across to me very strongly when I was making my preparations for this debate was that very many women would have felt much better if only someone at the hospital had perhaps held their hand, or put an arm round them and just offered some words of comfort. It does not cost anything to do that, nor does it take much time. These women should be given the opportunity to discuss what has happened with an informed and, above all, sympathetic health professional. Some women will need access to skilled counsellors, although this is rarely available. I referred, in one of my anecdotes, to one woman who said that the depression following a miscarriage lasted for 17 years. Every health authority should plan the provision of

follow-up care involving both hospital services and community services. There are practical matters too on which a woman will need advice. How long can she expect her bleeding to continue after miscarriage? Should she use tampons or sanitary towels? Nobody tells her. How can she know? Not only is she left prey to depression and anxiety and, very often, a great deal of physical pain, but she does not even know the answers to such questions.

The fifth suggestion concerns statistics. Detailed miscarriage statistics according to class and region are not available. I realise the difficulties, but even an approximation would be very helpful.

The sixth, and final, suggestion relates to the Miscarriage Association. This association does excellent work. However good the health service provision, many women need the support and information that only such a support group can give. The Miscarriage Association has branches in various places all over the country. Its headquarters is in Yorkshire. It could do so much more. Its founder recounted that, at the beginning, she was on the telephone until the small hours of the morning. She said that she did not get out of her nightdress until about tea time. Her phone rang and rang and rang. She talked to desperate women who had suffered miscarriage and who wanted to talk to someone about their experiences.

I am afraid that my hon. Friend the Minister is looking slightly uncomfortable when I talk about money. I know that the Miscarriage Association, like many other organisations promoting worthy causes, has approached him. Nevertheless, I press upon him the excellent work that it does.

I hope that in dealing with this subject tonight I have done two things: first, raised public consciousness of this extremely important but much-ignored matter; secondly, drawn attention to the fact that those who have suffered miscarriage need not fear rejection at the hands of the public, or of their friends, or of their spouses, or feel that in some way they have failed.

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The House will agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), in raising what he has quite rightly described as a difficult subject, has done us a service. As he made clear, miscarriage is an event that occurs in the lives of many families in this country. It is not as uncommon as one might like to think. My hon. Friend, by raising the issue, has achieved his objective of increasing awareness, in this House and outside, of the problem and of encouraging the idea that a family in which there has been a miscarriage or a stillbirth should not suffer the sense of rejection or of guilt that very often typifies that event.

I should like to begin by setting the subject in context. As my hon. Friend rightly said, although it is rarely discussed, miscarriage happens much more often than public discussion would suggest. In the nature of things, it is not an event that lends itself to central statistical measurement. My hon. Friend sought better statistics, but, of his six items, that is one of the more difficult to respond to as miscarriages are not always the subject of sufficiently detailed medical intervention to allow accurate reporting.

Estimates exist on how often miscarriages happen. The best estimate is that between one in three and one in five conceptions end in miscarriage. My hon. Friend is right to say that it is far from being an unusual or uncommon occurrence.

Happily, stillbirth is much less common. Obviously, however, it is much more traumatic for the family to whom it happens. Stillbirth lends itself to statistical measurement. I am happy to say that the statistics reflect a substantial success story for the health service since its inception. In 1948, there were just over 23 stillbirths per thousand live births, but by 1989 the figure had fallen to 4·7 per thousand. That is a substantial reduction in the incidence of stillbirth, and it reflects a similar reduction in perinatal deaths in Britain.

The reduction in the incidence of stillbirth and perinatal death is an important public health objective of the health service. We have achieved substantial reductions since 1948, which has continued in the 1980s. We are not complacent about that; there is still substantial variation between and within regions, and the opportunity exists for further reduction in the incidence of that unhappy event. We have made substantial progress and are committed to seeking to continue to improve on that record.

My hon. Friend rightly stressed the need for individuals who have suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth in their family to be encouraged to talk openly about it and to understand the physiological and psychological implications of what has happened. My hon. Friend also rightly stressed that good public health education should ensure that women who suffer a miscarriage understand the physiological consequences of miscarriage. We should try to ensure that if a woman suffers a miscarriage she is aware of the danger of haemorrhaging, that she takes the necessary medical advice, and that she recognises the symptoms. That should be one of the objectives of our health education programme. I shall seek to ensure that the objective that my hon. Friend raised is achieved.

My hon. Friend is right to say that not only must we concentrate on the physiological implications but we must ensure that couples have the opportunity to understand the psychological pressures which miscarriage can cause. My hon. Friend described feelings of bitterness and anger. That is true. An individual may feel angry and bitter and, perhaps more powerfully, may feel guilty, looking back over the past three, six or nine months and saying, "What did I do which led to the conception not being brought to a successful delivery?" It is to try to provide an outlet for such questioning that proper social support should exist for women who suffer a miscarriage or stillbirth.

My hon. Friend was anxious not to take a swipe, as he put it, at insensitive health professionals. I would be much less circumspect about that. If a health professional was insensitive, I would be happy to see a swipe taken at that person, because it should be part of the training of all health professionals to remember that, although they are dealing with something that they understand and they regard as routine, the patient may not understand it and will definitely not regard it as routine. Therefore, in every instance the health professional should treat the patient with great sensitivity.

I believe that professionals in the National Health Service set themselves a standard of sensitivity which they meet. The standard of professional service offered through the NHS is very high in the great majority of cases, but my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to instances of insensitive treatment, not least in order to ensure that

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

those who are responsible for clinical standards within the health service are aware of such instances and use them to try to ensure that they do not recur.

My hon. Friend also stressed the importance of follow-up care by ensuring that there is available not only professional health expertise but also the social support that is necessary to restore confidence and encourage the sufferer back into a full normal life. My hon. Friend mentioned the role of social workers, and hospital social workers in particular, in providing that support. They are important and play a valuable role. Hospital chaplains and the generality of social workers also play an important role, as do general practitioners. All involved in offering health and social care to the community have a role to play in ensuring that those who suffer miscarriage or stillbirth understand and are helped to work through the implications. I acknowledge the work of health professionals and of social workers in offering support.

I also pay tribute to the work done by the voluntary sector, particularly in support of sufferers. My hon. Friend mentioned the work of the Miscarriage Association, to which I will return. It is also proper to mention the work of the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society and of other voluntary bodies working in this sphere, notably Cruse —bereavement care—and the Partnership of Child Loss Support Groups, all of which are active and all of which receive public support through the section 64 grant programme to the voluntary sector. They are all active in providing precisely the kind of support for which my hon. Friend rightly and properly calls.

I want to refer briefly to a couple of points raised by my hon. Friend about the disposal of the results of miscarriage or of stillbirth. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress that sensitive handling should be regarded as a high priority. He rightly says that the remains are not waste products and must not be handled as such. They are certainly not regarded in that light by the bereaved parents. The Government are on record as accepting that we should change the definition of stillbirth so that it is brought in line with the law on abortion. We have made it clear that we are sympathetic to the proposition that a foetus that is born dead after 24 weeks should be entitled to the protection of the rules that currently operate for stillbirths after 28 weeks.

Disposal and the other handling of these tissues in hospitals are factors that should be addressed by the guidelines which the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society has drawn up in collaboration with professional bodies in the voluntary sector and which my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will launch on 27 February. I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that our welcome to those guidelines represents a degree of interest in the importance of setting standards for the proper and sensitive handling of these issues.

My hon. Friend referred to the work of the Miscarriage Association. He will know that the Department of Health has provided support to that body since 1986 under the terms of the section 64 scheme which provides support to voluntary bodies from the health budget. In the current financial year, the association has received a grant of £4,000 and the Department is now considering two applications from the association for the next three years. We are considering, first, the renewal of core grant towards central administrative costs and, secondly, a project funding application to make information about miscarriage accessible to any woman who has suffered a miscarriage, including those from ethnic minority groups —a target group that is of special importance in ensuring the understanding of the full physiological and psychological consequences of these events. I want to place particular importance on ensuring that we get through to ethnic minority groups as part of our target population.

My hon. Friend will appreciate that it is too early to divulge the outcome of those applications. However, they are being considered and I can assure him that they will be considered sympathetically. As I have stressed, the Department recognises and values the role of voluntary bodies in providing the support that families need when they suffer such an instance. We have supported a range of voluntary organisations in this area in the past and we intend to continue to do so. We shall consider very sympathetically the applications currently in from the Miscarriage Association.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 3) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Gulf War Casualties

1. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the availability of national health service hospitals in Scotland to be used for the treatment of casualty victims of the Gulf war.

5. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what extra funds have been made available to health authorities in Scotland in respect of casualties arising from the Gulf war.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): Hospital beds in Scotland will be made available for the treatment of casualties from the Gulf. The number of casualties and their particular treatment needs will determine which hospitals become involved. It is, however, expected that the first hospitals in Scotland to be asked to receive casualties would be those in the Glasgow and Edinburgh areas. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State announced on 16 January, health boards will be reimbursed the full costs of treating any Gulf casualties.

Mr. Ewing: May I, in advance, pay my personal tribute to the doctors, nurses and all the other support and ancillary staff for the undoubted dedication that they will show the victims of this wholly unnecessary war? Will the Secretary of State give us his commitment and an absolute guarantee that the additional resources made available will not be clawed back and that the beds that will be made available will not be closed down after the emergency is over, in appreciation of the fact that there will be a continuing civilian emergency as a result of the operations and treatments that will have been delayed?

Mr. Lang: I am sure that the whole House will agree with the hon. Gentleman's tribute to the doctors, nurses and ancillary staff who may be involved in treating casualties from the Gulf, especially those in the medical and nursing professions who have gone to the Gulf to be available there. I am equally sure that most of the House would not agree with his reference to the conflict in the Gulf being unnecessary. I have made it clear that health boards will be reimbursed for the costs incurred. Clearly, the minimum disruption will be caused to waiting lists and other health board interests.

Mr. Dalyell: Are the maimed, the shockingly injured and the appallingly burnt, many of whom will suffer from long-term psychiatric damage, likely to be better treated than heroes of previous wars? Will the Secretary of State use his position in the British Cabinet to do everything possible to prevent a land war, to stop the inhuman bombing of Iraq and to accept with enthusiasm the tentative proposals put forward by the Iranians who will have to be locked into any stable settlement?

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the British Government are fully committed to assisting in the implementation of the United Nations resolutions. That is why our armed forces are in the Gulf. He may be assured that casualties will be given the best possible care and that the first priority will be to meet the needs of each individual casualty.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that with so many Scots serving in the Gulf on behalf of the United Nations we should assure them that if any of them are injured and return to Scottish hospitals, they will be treated properly and effectively, as only Scots can look after their own? More importantly, will we remind them that, although for years Opposition Members have called on this House and others to support the United Nations, when the chips are down they have been found wanting?

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend. Our first priority must be to ensure that all casualties from the Gulf receive the best possible care. An operations group in the Scottish Home and Health Department will oversee the arrangements.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that all the evidence since 2 August is that Saddam Hussein is an evil psychopath and that to give in to his blackmail would be wrong? Does he further agree that the number of casualties would be greater if we waited until Saddam Hussein had a nuclear deterrent, rather than dealt with him now? This unnecessary war has been brought about because Saddam Hussein felt it necessary to attack Kuwait.

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend's every word. It is very much to the credit of the allied operation that every attempt has been made to minimise casualties to our own side and to minimise casualties to Iraq's civilian population.

Mr. Galbraith: May I return to the issue at stake—the question of casualties? Will the Secretary of State agree to make available the necessary moneys for the prompt treatment of all those patients whose operations will be delayed as a result of casualties from the war? Will the right hon. Gentleman also agree that many of the Gulf casualties will be disabled and will require long-term care and rehabilitation? Facilities for such care in Scotland are at best inadequate and, at worse, non-existent. Will the Secretary of State ask the health boards to identify the numbers requiring such care and the additional services required? Will he then provide the necessary finance to the health boards and the social workers to ensure the long-term care and rehabilitation not only of our service men, but of all other national health service patients?

Mr. Lang: I have already made it clear that the health boards will be reimbursed the full cost of treating any Gulf casualties and, therefore, none of the funds allocated to those boards for their normal activities will be in any way displaced or jeopardised.

As to the long-term treatment and rehabilitation needs of Gulf casualties, clearly every effort will be made to give the best possible attention to the needs of each individual casualty.

Farm Incomes

2. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his latest estimates of farm incomes in Scotland; and what financial steps he is taking to ensure the future viability of the agricultural industry.

Mr. Lang: Latest estimates of farm incomes in Scotland were published by my Department on 21 January and details were placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I keep the financial health of the Scottish agricultural industry under regular review and will take what measures are necessary to ensure that the industry is able to compete effectively and to maintain its vital contribution to our rural areas.

Mr. Welsh: Is the Minister truly aware of the extent of the crisis currently facing the Scottish agricultural industry, with farm incomes at their lowest levels in real terms since the second world war, high interest rates, rising costs and a record number of farmers leaving the industry? Given that whatever threatens agriculture also threatens every rural community in Scotland, why has there been no main payment of the hill livestock compensatory amount —HLCA—to the much troubled livestock industry? Why is there no emergency package to prevent the modern-day clearances of the hills and upland areas of Scotland? When will the Government act for agriculture?

Mr. Lang: I certainly acknowledge that some sectors of the agricultural industry are going through a period of considerable financial difficulty. The Government are keen to respond to that—our record is one of good response. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the HLCA and, in 1990, £48 million was paid to 18,000 Scottish producers. We are keen to deal with HLCA as soon as we can and I hope that the form will be going out within the next few days.

Sir Hector Monro: May I thank my right hon. Friend for the help that he has given to farmers through the large increase in the suckler cow subsidy and through the advance payment of the sheep annual premium? Does he appreciate, however, that the cash flow of many farmers in the hills in particular depends upon the payment of the HLCA? I hope that he will be able to announce the figures soon and that that payment will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Lang: I understand and share my hon. Friend's concern on this matter. He rightly drew attention to the sheep annual premium scheme—we were able to accelerate payments of that premium this year—and to the suckler cow premium scheme where we raised the level to the highest rate permitted in the less-favoured areas. I also acknowledge the need to get the funds out to the farmers as quickly as we can.

Rural Economy, Fife

4. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals to sustain the rural economy in north-east Fife; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): On the most recent available figures, between 1984 and 1987 total employment in the north-east Fife travel-to-work area increased by 2·2 per cent.; since 1987 unemployment has been declining sharply in north-east Fife; between 1981 and 1989 the population has grown by some 4·1 per cent.

The Government aim to build on those highly encouraging indicators of economic progress. Fife Enterprise, the local enterprise company for the Fife region, will be able to deliver the Government's economic development, training and environmental improvement programmes in a way which is best suited to the particular needs of the area.

Mr. Campbell: Does the Minister understand the contribution that the fishing industry makes to constituencies such as mine? Does he appreciate the resentment felt there and throughout fishing communities in Scotland at the folly of the eight-day tie-up rule? Was not that rule imposed on Scottish fishermen, at least in part, because of the culpable failure of the Government to produce an effective decommissioning scheme?

Mr. Stewart: I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that in negotiations the Government reduced the period from 10 to eight days. I must also point out the key need to conserve stocks in the North sea. I can reassure him on the general implications for the area. The business plan of Fife Enterprise emphasises the changing place of agriculture and fishing in the rural economy and gives a priority to the development of tourism and leisure. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured about the strength of the economy of north-east Fife by the figures that I gave him in my answer.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's policy of providing a strong and diverse base for the Scottish economy helps all regions?

Mr. Allan Stewart: My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right. It is significant that Scotland is the only part of Britain where unemployment is lower than a year ago and that most commentators suggest that Scotland will have had one of the highest, if not the highest, rate of growth in 1990. NatWest has forecast that Scotland will have continuing growth in 1991.

Mr. McLeish: Is the Minister aware of the importance of Rosyth naval base to the whole of Fife, including north-east Fife? Is he also aware that the Prime Minister has said that he wants to examine closely the implications of closure of that base on Fife's economy? Will he give an assurance this afternoon that the Scottish Office will be fully involved in any such discussions and that the Secretary of State and all his ministerial team will take cognisance of what is happening? Will the Minister come back later and give an assessment of the implications for the Fife economy and the Scottish economy because there will be a dire effect on the local area as well as north-east Fife?

Mr. Stewart: I appreciate the importance of the hon. Gentleman's point for the whole of Fife. I can confirm that no decision has been made to close Rosyth or, for that matter, any other naval base. The Government fully recognise the implications that any such closure would have for the economy. Those implications would be fully considered and examined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, along with colleagues before any such decision was taken—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Dewar: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me. My interest in the rural economy of north-east Fife is well known.

To follow up the important point that the Minister made, he will be aware that there are strong signs that a Ministry of Defence working party has been established, apparently with the specific remit of closing the Rosyth naval base within the shortest possible time scale. Does that exist and is that its remit? What is the Scottish Office doing to ensure that any review of naval bases examines every option on its merits and does not prejudge the issue by putting Rosyth on a hit list of one?

Mr. Stewart: I share the hon. Gentleman's obvious regret that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) has arrived just after his question was reached. May I assure the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) that, while I clearly cannot comment on alleged leaked documents, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be fully involved in any such discussions about Rosyth.

NHS Hospitals

6. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients were treated in national health service hospitals in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what the figures were in 1979.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The number of out-patient attendances and in-patients treated has increased by a staggering 900,000 a year compared with 1979.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures above all others show the improvement in the national health service in Scotland since 1979, because they concern patients—human beings who have been treated?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not only are we treating almost a million more patients but we have increased the number of doctors by about 9 per cent. and the number of nurses by 14 per cent.; and expenditure has risen from £1 billion to more than £3 billion, which represents an increase of a third, over and above prices. That is the extent of the Government's commitment to the national health service.

Mr. Wray: As 40 per cent. of Scottish troops are in the front line and as it is estimated that we shall need 7,500 beds for them, and as thousands of people have given blood since that announcement, how does the Minister differentiate between blood for the Gulf troops and blood to be sold to the private sector?

Mr. Forsyth: As one who has given blood as part of the appeal by the blood transfusion service—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not think that this should be a matter of controversy between us. I urge others to register as donors, if they have not already done so as part of the blood transfusion service appeal. The majority of blood donors will take the same view as I do—that blood is freely given to save lives wherever those lives are being saved.

Mr. Riddick: I start by congratulating my hon. Friend —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is Question Time.

Mr. Riddick: May I congratulate my hon. Friend and all his colleagues on the excellent opinion poll in yesterday's newspapers which showed that the Conservative party—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is Scottish Question Time.

Mr. Riddick: May I suggest to my hon. Friend that one of the reasons for the excellent showing in the opinion polls in Scotland is the Government's increasing investment in the national health service there? Does he agree that the surest way of ensuring greater patient care and more investment in Scottish hospitals is the re-election of a Conservative Government at the next general election?

Mr. Forsyth: Surprising as it might seem, my hon. Friend was referring to an opinion poll in Scotland. It is certainly good news. I have no doubt that there are various reasons for it, but the sort of behaviour that we are witnessing today among Opposition Members, who are trying to frustrate our telling the good news about the health service, is doubtless a contributory factor.

Orkney and Shetland Ferries

7. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the Government subvention on the ferry services to Orkney and Shetland in 1991-92.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I discussed the issue of the subvention to ferry services with representatives of Orkney and Shetland islands councils on 25 January and my right hon. Friend and I continue to receive written representations from organisations and individuals.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister will know that he and the Secretary of State have acknowledged that freight charge increases of more than 20 per cent. are bound to have a damaging impact on the local economy and that there may well be a need in the longer term to review the operation of the current subvention. Will he accept that we have an immediate problem and that P and O has not come up with anything in response to requests to review its projections for the year? If the economies of the islands are not to be damaged in coming months, help is needed, and that help can come only from the department. What is the Minister prepared to do about that?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have increased the subsidy by 17·5 per cent. and we have offered to review the situation in the summer to make certain that if P and O's estimates are wrong—we believe that they may well be

—we can make some form of arrangement to ensure that the full subsidy is paid—in line with the hon. Gentleman's request.

As for a different type of subsidy, I made it clear to the islands council representatives that if they want to put forward proposals we shall examine them carefully. This system has served the islands well in the past.

Primary Schools (National Tests)

8. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the introduction of national tests in primary schools.

Mr. Lang: More than 100 representations about the introduction of national tests in primary schools have been received in the last three months.

Mr. Bruce: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, having been given the chance to choose, parents are overwhelmingly saying that they do not want his national test and that he should now scrap it in favour of co-operation with parents and teachers to meet the genuine demand for diagnostic testing which everybody wants and which can be integral to the five-to-14 programme? Does he agree that that would be a constructive way forward which showed that he believes in parental choice, even when parents do not choose what he offers?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman was not listening clearly to my answer. The figure that I gave of 100 representations should be compared with the 430,000 children in primary schools. It is clear that the test process is part of the general improvement in the handling of the curriculum and assessment for primary school children. It is very much to their advantage and it benefits children, schools, teachers, parents and Scottish education.

Mr. Ingram: Has the Secretary of State studied the detailed survey that has been carried out in my constituency and organised by St. Leonard's PTA? That survey clearly shows that the overwhelming majority of parents are opposed to this scheme. Will he take account of that view and either guarantee here and now that parents will have the right, if they choose, to opt out of the testing or, more importantly, will he scrap the scheme altogether?

Mr. Lang: I find the hon. Gentleman's assessment of parental views incredible. These tests are for the benefit of children and Scottish education. They are a small part of an overall and continuing process of assessment and will lead to an improvement in the standards of education in Scottish primary schools.

Mr. Worthington: Does the Secretary of State accept the legal opinion of what a regional council should do about informing parents about the test? Is it in accordance with section 28 of the 1980 Act about children being educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents? There should be a tear-off slip on the form to allow parents to decide whether their children should be tested. The parents should be given a choice, and the school and the Secretary of State should abide by the decision of the parents.

Mr. Lang: It is reassuring to note that the Opposition are suddenly so concerned about parents' rights in education, having tried so hard for so long to deny them. It is relevant to remind the House that the Opposition did not oppose the regulations about national tests in primary schools, and did not oppose the provision in the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 which brought them into being. I think that the Opposition believe, certainly English Opposition Members believe, that testing is a necessary part of education. Teaching without testing is like cooking without tasting or writing without reading. We cannot have one without the other.

Sport

10. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what Scottish Office initiatives are planned to mark 1991 as the Year of Sport.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have found an extra £1·5 million to launch a pound-for-pound funding scheme for local sport club facilities, to help regenerate participation in school-age team sport and to provide for the redevelopment of the Glenmore Lodge training centre.

Mr. Canavan: When will the Minister make an announcement about the £320 million required to provide the new sports facilities that are recommended in the Scottish Sports Council's excellent document "Sports 2000"? Will the Minister respond to the report about school-age team sport, especially in view of his comments that competitive standards in team sports are a national disgrace? Will he do something about that other national disgrace, Hampden Park, by ensuring that adequate Government funding is provided either to improve Hampden Park or to replace it so that Scotland has a national stadium of which the Scots can be proud?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that I made an announcement about those matters over the weekend in a speech which, I regret to say, was not reported, no doubt because it contained more good news. The "Sports 2000" document is addressed to government and local authorities. Local authorities have to respond to it and they would be in a better position to do that if people such as the hon. Gentleman paid their community charge.

The hon. Gentleman asks about team sport. If he had listened to my answer, he would have heard me say that I made £400,000 available for co-ordinators to be put in place to try to get team sport back and functioning. He also asked about Hampden Park. We have made it quite clear to the football authorities that we should like to see a new national stadium. They have still to decide the best way forward for that and the Government have said that they are prepared to help.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Minister remember that the Government once offered to contribute £8 million towards the cost of a new national stadium, although that offer was subsequently withdrawn? Index linked and allowing for inflation, that offer would be worth £20 million. Would not it be a valuable and worthwhile way to mark the year of sport to make that offer again? Will the Minister have discussions with the Scottish Football Authority about the best way to make an offer of £20 million towards the recreation of a new Hampden Park?

Mr. Forsyth: I have been having discussion with the SFA formally and informally on this matter for some time. At the splendid international at Murrayfield, I took the

opportunity to have further discussions with the football authorities about this, and they are deciding the best way forward. It would be foolish to come to any conclusions about the Government's contribution in advance of any scheme being endorsed by the football authorities. The hon. Gentleman will, I think, find that a number of his hon. Friends share that view.

Mr. John D. Taylor: How much of the additional money that the Minister has announced will be made available to improve the standard of rugby in Scotland, in view of the probable defeat of Scotland by Ireland?

Mr. Forsyth: I had no idea that the right hon. Gentleman was such an optimist. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to what the rugby authorities have done to encourage youngsters to become involved in team sports, which has played no small part in achieving the splendid quality of rugby football that we have seen in recent years in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: I thank my hon. Friend for his pound-for-pound scheme, which will be valuable for sports facilities. When will he introduce regulations to give a fair deal to football clubs on valuation rating? Is he aware that of the two recent new grounds, Scunthorpe in England pays £12,000 and St. Johnstone in Perth pays £90,000? That cannot be fair? Will my hon. Friend take action?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is on to something which has also been raised with me by the all-party sports group. At that time, I gave a clear commitment that we would take action. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), the Minister with responsibility for local government, is aware of this and we plan to meet the SFA to discuss how we can bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he is Minister with responsibility for the national health service in Scotland and for sport in Scotland on the ground that he cares as much about the one as about the other?

Will the hon. Gentleman stop avoiding responsibility for "Sports 2000" and tell us why the Scottish Sports Council, two and a half years after presenting its major strategy document to him, has not yet had the courtesy of a response from the Scottish Office? Will he stop passing the buck by saying—to pre-empt his answer—that the "Sports 2000" campaign is aimed at local authorities when in fact it is aimed at the Government and Government Departments? Given the Minister's dual role, will he acknowledge that the main thrust of that document was the establishment of the important link between sports participation, investment in sports facilities and public health in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman arrived late to the meeting of the Scottish Association of Local Sports Councils on Saturday, which is no doubt why he missed my great unpublicised speech making it clear that we were committed to "Sports 2000" as an important working document setting out the future, addressed both to local government and to central Government. If the hon. Gentleman is not aware of it, I will repeat it once again. When the document was published, I met the chairman of the Sports Council, gave him our support and said that we saw this as a useful means for long-term planning. Our commitment to sports in Scotland is indeed as great as our commitment to the health service. That is why we increased funding for sports in Scotland by no less than 28 per cent. this year, just as we have increased funding to the health service by one third in real terms. Under the Labour Government, funding for both was cut.

Law Centres

11. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to create more law centres in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no plans at present to create more law centres in Scotland.

Mr. Vaz: Will the Minister join me in commending the work of the Castlemilk law centre in Scotland for its excellent work on behalf of the people of Scotland? Does he accept that the work load of the two law centres has increased dramatically over the past two years as a direct result of the Government's policies, especially in areas such as debt, housing and social security? Will the Minister undertake to come to the House with proposals to increase the number of law centres in Scotland, at the very least to the same number that currently exist per capita in England?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are four law centres in Scotland. In response to the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) in Committee in the summer, we changed the law to ensure that there was no statutory barrier to solicitors working in them and receiving a fee. That has all gone through. There is the Castlemilk law centre, to which the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) paid tribute, the Scottish child law centre, the Scottish legal services agency and the ethnic legal services project. If a local authority feels that there is a need for such a centre, it should submit an application for urban aid and we shall look upon it sympathetically because the law centres have an important role to play. The ethnic legal services project is funded through the urban programme. As I have already mentioned, we have changed the law to ensure that there is no statutory bar to further expansion.

Steel Plants

12. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has given to the Office of Fair Trading concerning expressions of interest from potential buyers of Scottish steel plants from British Steel.

Mr. Lang: I have given no information on potential buyers of Scottish steel plants to the Office of Fair Trading. The expressions of interest received by the Scottish Office were made in the strictest confidence and it would not be appropriate to release the details to third parties.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister explain further why he gives such an enormous advantage to British Steel? Does he think that the people of Scotland will ever forget that he preferred to put steel workers on the dole than to upset the board of British Steel?

Mr. Lang: British Steel's decision to close the hot strip mill at Ravenscraig and the Clydesdale tube works was taken by its board on commercial grounds. It is not a matter for the Government, who have no direct

responsibility. My concern is to ensure that the economy of Lanarkshire and the rest of Scotland is in as healthy a state as can be achieved, and it is to that that I am bending my efforts.

Dr. Bray: Is the Minister aware that casual inquiries in the United States and Tokyo by Locate in Scotland or itinerant Ministers is not a serious sales effort and will he ensure that a proper sales prospectus is prepared for British Steel assets in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows better than most that those assets are not mine to sell and I am not responsible for selling them. Nor is British Steel in such a dominant position as Opposition Members imply, when only some 17 per cent. of the capacity available to British Steel users is in the hands of British Steel.

Mr. Holt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one thing that would help the Scottish steel industry in selling off its assets would be a clear, unequivocal undertaking from the Labour party that it would never seek to impose ministerial interference and renationalisation of that great industry?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes his point clearly and I fully understand his close interest in the steel industry.

Mr. Dewar: The exchanges that we have just heard suggest that the Secretary of State has given up the fight entirely. Is it still his position that the Government are challenging and attempting to reverse the decision to close the strip mill at Ravenscraig? Is he really prepared to tolerate a situation in which British Steel, in its prejudice, is blocking all expressions of interest in the purchase of the strip mill? Is not that a negation of competition policy? Knowing of such interest—it was the Secretary of State who revealed it—is he not prepared to do anything to test the market? Does he intend to allow British Steel to stifle competition in a way that cannot be in the public interest?

Mr. Lang: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that the European Commission's competition directorate has given its provisional view that under the treaty of Paris the actions of British Steel are not anti-competitive. I think that he is also aware that the Director General of Fair Trading has concluded that on the basis of the evidence available to him at present, he has no reason to exercise his competition powers. Anyone wishing to bid for any of the assets of British Steel is free to approach British Steel and welcome to do so.

I have not given up—if there is any possibility of saving any steel jobs in Scotland, I am willing to help towards that end. The trade unions have decided to accept negotiations, and the Arthur D. Little report has said that the overall climate for steel investment in Scotland is not attractive and that Scotland is not well placed to compete. I think that most people in Scotland are realistic about the situation. I certainly regard my primary responsibility as being to help regenerate the economy of Lanarkshire.

Mr. Oppenheim: Did not the type of meddling now being advocated by Opposition Members for the steel industry result in a disastrously inefficient industry in the 1970s, and has not British Steel actually flourished since the politicians relinquished their grip? How can we take seriously professions of concern from Opposition Members when we remember that it was their union chums who led to the Ford plant going to Spain rather than to Dundee?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and makes the point extremely well. Between 1975 and 1985, at today's prices, the taxpayer had to contribute no less than £14 billion—the equivalent of £25 million per week—to the steel industry. That did not improve competition, output, productivity or efficiency—all that it did was to prop up uncompetitive jobs at extreme cost to the taxpayer and considerable damage to other jobs in the economy.

Constitutional Reform

13. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has considered the proposals for constitutional reform approved by the Scottish Constitutional Convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The so-called convention's proposals would lead to more government and more taxes being foisted on Scots. This would not be in Scotland's interest.

Mr. Hogg: Why have the Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland set their minds against any discussions with the leaders of the Scottish Constitutional Convention? Why are they ignoring the claim of right—and the right—of the Scottish people to determine the arrangements for their own government? Would not it be better to enter negotiations now so that a parliament could be achieved within the United Kingdom, thus strengthening the union?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member ignores the fact that the so-called convention either avoids or disagrees on every difficult decision that it faces. I will give him an example. Last week a Labour campaign for electoral success was set up to stop proportional representation. The campaign is under the leadership of Mr. Eric Milligan, Mr. Pat Lalley and the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who are arguably—or perhaps unarguably—the three most important and powerful men in the Scottish Labour movement. The response from the Liberal Democrats appeared in today's *Glasgow Herald*, when the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) contended that Labour was the most conservative force in Scottish politics—the dinosaur where messages take a long time to reach the brain. I have every hope and expectation that the plans of the so-called convention will meet the same fate as the dinosaur.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that, although there may be differences of view about the voting system, there is absolutely no difference of view between the Liberal Democrats and all members of the Labour party that we need a Scottish assembly to deal with Scottish business, that in denying the Scottish people that assembly, the present minority Government are standing against the wishes of the Scottish people, and that that verdict will be given not just in Scotland but in the United Kingdom at the next election, when the Minister will once again return to the Back Benches, but on the Opposition side?

Mr. Stewart: On the last point, the hon. Member cannot have read the recent Scottish opinion poll, which

put the Conservative vote at 30 per cent.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—a good base on which we will build further. On the hon. Gentleman's substantive point, many people, when asked, will say that a Scottish assembly seems a good idea, but every time the hard questions are asked—how it would work, how it would relate to the United Kingdom, and what role the Secretary of State would play—there are no satisfactory answers.

Mr. Ian Bruce: May I ask my hon. Friend the Minister not to dismiss too lightly the concept of constitutional change within the United Kingdom in terms of Scottish interests? Many United Kingdom taxpayers would like equality of financing as between England, Scotland and Wales—and equality of representation in this House. Scottish taxpayers could meet the full cost of the new assembly if they wished, but I believe that when the figure became known, the case for keeping things as they are would be unanswerable.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend puts his finger on an important point and raises a question that the so-called convention has not satisfactorily answered. My hon. Friend is also right to remind the House that identifiable expenditure per head is 23 per cent. greater for Scotland than for England.

Mr. Salmond: If the Minister wants to ask hard questions, why does he not do so in a referendum offering a choice between the convention's scheme, independence in Europe, and the status quo? Does not the Government's refusal to do so owe much to the fact that they know that in an independent Scotland no Minister with responsibility for industry would stand idly by and watch the destruction of the Scottish steel industry while enormous potential remains in the North sea market?

Mr. Stewart: I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman is sounding a little less confident than usual. The last Labour Government put specific legislative proposals to a referendum, but no specific proposals now exist to be put to a referendum or otherwise considered. The real test of who governs the United Kingdom is which party wins the largest number of seats in the United Kingdom Parliament. I am sure that at the next general election that will continue to be the Conservative and Unionist party.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the convention fails to meet its own criteria? One is that the new assembly should be accountable, and it fails that test. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Does my hon. Friend further agree that the failure to address the Goshen-Barnett formula and also the number of Members of Parliament required to represent Scotland in this House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that the hon. Member was merely casting his eyes down.

Mr. Walker: I do not need to read this, Mr. Speaker. The convention also fails to address the 'Tam' West Lothian question. Until those three matters have been addressed, the convention will be neither credible nor accountable, and none of its measures would ever get through this Parliament.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on each of the three points that he made. The convention fails to address any important questions, including those to which my hon. Friend drew attention.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Minister acknowledge that debate on those matters has not taken place because the Conservative party and the Government refuse to accept the legitimate demands of the Scottish people to play a constructive role in responding to them? If the Minister believes that certain issues should now be addressed, will the Government start to participate in the convention and make constructive proposals? Is it right for the Minister to continue abusing the convention when even the Confederation of British Industry and business interests in Scotland acknowledge that Scotland will have its own parliament and that they will need to work with it?

Mr. Stewart: The convention is an entirely self-appointed body. As regards business opinion, I refer the hon. Gentleman to page 20 of *The Scotsman* today, where a leading multinational industrialist gives his views, under the heading,

"Silicon Glen chief warns of devolution 'suicide'".

He pointed out what the reaction of multinational business, which has such an important role in the Scottish economy, would be if any of these absurd proposals ever showed any likelihood of being implemented.

Mr. McKelvey: No one on the Opposition side of the House would grudge the Minister, or any Conservative, their apparent joy in the fact that almost a third of the people in Scotland might vote for them in a forthcoming election. Nevertheless, does the Minister agree that the Conservatives are dodging the issue again, just as they have dodged the issue—and their responsibility to Scotland—by failing to serve on a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? The people of Scotland know precisely what is going on in the House and they will not accept that situation. The Government should not be afraid to put the matter to the test. We argue that if we are fighting a war to protect some sort of democracy, the call for democracy in Scotland has to be answered—and it will only be answered when the people of Scotland get the opportunity, in a referendum, to decide how Scotland is to be governed.

Mr. Stewart: The Government will put their policies to the test at the next general election, when the people of the United Kingdom will decide.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister can no longer pretend that the Scottish Constitutional Convention has no democratic credibility in Scotland when he and the Conservative party have none whatever. The Government do not have democratic backing from the Scottish people for any of their proposals. Is it not time, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said, that the Tory party came into the convention and discussed the proper way forward as regards constitutional change in Scotland so that a Scottish parliament can be established, which would give the people of Scotland the right to decide their own affairs within the framework of the United Kingdom? Is the Minister aware that the Conservative party's stubborn refusal to accept the Scottish people's demands for that change is putting the union itself at risk?

Mr. Stewart: If that is true, it is surprising that the Conservative vote is going up in the opinion polls. I should

also point out to the hon. Gentleman that the convention started out as a so-called broad front of all those against the unionist position. The Scottish National party left fairly quickly, the Greens left more recently, and now it sounds as though the Liberal Democrats may be leaving, despite the fact that their position in the opinion polls suggests that they would probably remain members of almost anything that would have them.

Mr. Norman Hogg: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the most unsatisfactory nature of the Minister's replies, I shall be seeking to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful for the information, but it is not legitimate to raise this matter since it was not the hon. Member's question. [HON. MEMBERS: "It was."] I am sorry. In that case, I withdraw my comment. I am glad to know that the hon. Gentleman will seek to raise this matter on the Adjournment.

Rural Ambulance Service

14. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the director of the Scottish ambulance service to discuss the ambulance service in rural areas.

Mr. Forsyth: I spoke with the new general manager of the Scottish ambulance service recently and have provided an additional £8 million to strengthen the service in rural areas by eliminating single manning, to increase the numbers of ambulance men with paramedical skills and to fund the new helicopter service.

Mrs. Michie: The Minister knows of my concern about single manning of ambulances in rural areas. Does he agree that his recent announcement of more money is not sufficient to make an immediate difference in rural areas, where there is a crying need for extra ambulance personnel? They are urgently needed in my constituency and in other parts of Scotland. When will this unacceptable practice end?

Mr. Forsyth: I share the hon. Lady's enthusiasm for progress on this matter. We have provided an increase of about 20 per cent. in resources for the ambulance service this year and I am confident that we shall move towards the elimination of single manning. I know that the hon. Lady takes a great interest in the ambulance service in rural areas, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). I know, too, that one of the matters that have caused concern is the question of the new centralised control of the service. I have spoken to the new director, who has given that matter his attention, and I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that we can help in that respect.

In rural areas, where circumstances merit it, we shall return to the old system enabling general practitioners to make direct contact with local ambulance crews for non-emergency transport, provided that central control is also informed. I hope that the hon. Lady will recognise that we are going some way towards meeting the anxieties that she and others have raised.

Housing, Foxbar

15. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to visit the Foxbar area of Paisley to assess its housing needs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to visit the Foxbar area of Paisley.

Mr. McMaster: At the risk of disappointing the Minister, I must tell him that I learned yesterday that he had visited Foxbar before, but that his visit went largely unnoticed. Will he consider returning, and perhaps this time trying to achieve some results for the people of Foxbar as his previous visit did not make one bit of difference to the standard of living there? While he is there, will the Minister make a day of it and come with me to Ardgowan court, Hunterhill and other places in Paisley, Johnstone and Elderslie, to see the damp and decaying houses in which people have to live as a result of his housing policy?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have visited the hon. Gentleman's district several times, and I have been to Foxbar twice. On the first occasion, I was photographed under a large placard saying, "Foxbar says no to Scottish Homes". Since then, however, Scottish Homes has indeed become established. I was pleased to learn that it had contributed some substantial and positive work in the area, as well as substantial funds. That will continue.

The question of allocations for the other districts was raised with me by the district councillors whom I met in the summer. The provisional allocation has been £17·604 million, a higher allocation per council house than last year's. I shall, however, keep in mind the points made by the hon. Gentleman before the final allocation is made in March.

Manufacturing Output

17. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the change in manufacturing output in Scotland for each of the last six years for which figures are available.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The latest available full-year figures relate to 1989. In the six-year period from 1983 to 1989, manufacturing output rose by over 21 per cent.

Between 1983 and 1984, output rose by 4·6 per cent.; between 1984 and 1985, it rose by 2·2 per cent.; over the next year, there was a fall of 2·1 per cent.; between 1986 and 1987 there was a rise of 3·0 per cent.; a large rise of 7·7 per cent. was experienced between 1987 and 1988; and between 1988 and 1989, output rose by 4·5 per cent.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that the excellent increase in manufacturing productivity has fed through directly to increase the prosperity of the people of Scotland and that it has come about as a result of the Government's economic policies there? Does not that represent another reason why the Conservative party's opinion poll showing in Scotland has improved so dramatically? Do not the figures compare strikingly with the period under the last Labour Government when manufacturing output actually fell?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the first quarter of 1990, output was some 11 per cent. higher than in 1979, and some 6 per cent. higher than the previous

peak. My hon. Friend is right to point to the record of the last Labour Government—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen to this. Under the last Labour Government, manufacturing output in Scotland fell by 1·5 per cent.

Council of Ministers

18. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next attend a meeting of the European Council of Ministers.

Mr. Lang: I am ready to attend a meeting of the Council of Ministers whenever the circumstances require it.

Sir Russell Johnston: It would be interesting to know how often in recent times the circumstances have required it—quite often, I should have thought. Is the Secretary of State aware that all the German Länder and many of the regions of France and Spain maintain separate offices in Brussels? Does he agree that that is to their advantage? Why does not the Scottish Office do likewise?

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, comparisons between Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, and the Länder of Germany are irrelevant and spurious. In the European Community, Scotland's interests are very well represented through the United Kingdom's representative organisations. The hon. Gentleman may like to know that since 1979 Scotland has derived no less than £1·3 billion of benefits under various European schemes. That is six times as much as Denmark has received.

Scottish Homes

19. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the chairman of Scottish Homes to discuss its budget.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Homes is expected to submit its draft expenditure programme for 1991-92 later this month. My right hon. Friend and I expect to meet the chairman thereafter to discuss this and other matters.

Mr. Ross: Does not the proposed budget of Scottish Homes make nonsense of the rural conference that was held last year and of all the aims that were stated there? How does the Minister reconcile those aims with the proposed budget, under which none of the housing associations in Scotland will be able to provide a single new start?

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: I have not yet received the Scottish Homes programme, which has to be approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I can say, however, that £200 million will be allocated to housing associations. I believe that full account will be taken of the needs of traditional clients. Over the years, the role of housing associations has broadened and widened to take into account the interests of not just those who live in urban areas but those who live in rural areas. I believe that that will, indeed, be done. I am confident that Scottish Homes and its board will come forward with sensible proposals.

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take the point of order after the application under Standing Order No. 20.

Cold Weather (Elderly People)

3.31 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the urgent need for assistance for heating to be given to the elderly of limited means during the very cold weather."

The matter is specific, because of the cold weather that is being experienced all over the country. It is important, because a very large number of pensioners on very small incomes simply do not have anything like the means to keep their accommodation adequately heated. It requires urgent consideration, because it is downright scandalous that so many pensioners on such incomes should have to suffer in the present cold spell—the coldest we have had since January 1987.

The Government's cold weather payments are far from adequate. When all the conditions have been met, all that is paid is £5 a week. One could hardly describe that as a large sum of money. How many right hon. and hon. Members could keep their homes adequately heated on £5 a week? In today's *Evening Standard*, there is a cartoon that adequately sums up all the bureaucratic red tape that has to be cut through before the £5 is actually paid.

Let me relate to the House the information that I have. There are 64 weather stations in the country. In the areas of only a very small number of those—nine or 10—have the conditions for making the payments been met. That means that, in the great majority of areas, the payments, however inadequate, are not being made. Why is it that, in this country, 10 to 20 per cent. more elderly people die during the winter months than at other times of the year, and why is the figure here far higher than that in other European countries? In most European countries it is about 5 per cent. Surely this demonstrates the hardship, misery and deprivation that so many elderly people in this country suffer during the winter months. It is time the Government took action. It is time they allowed elderly people cold weather payments—and more.

I hope that, in view of all these circumstances, Mr. Speaker, you will consider the matter sufficiently important to allow a debate to take place.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The urgent need for assistance for heating to be given to the elderly of limited means during the very cold weather."

As the House knows, under Standing Order No. 20 I have to announce my decision to the House without giving any reasons. I have listened with concern to what the hon. Gentleman has said. As he knows, I have to decide whether the application comes within the Standing Order and, if so, whether a debate should take place today or tomorrow. I regret that the matter that he has raised does not meet the requirements of the Standing Order and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take first the point of order from the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will accept that what I am about to say is not even an implied criticism of you. Those who follow our proceedings carefully will have been greatly surprised this afternoon that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), who is no longer in the Chamber, asked two questions when some of us did not even have an opportunity to ask one.

There could be a great deal of confusion in the minds of those who follow our proceedings, because we have now adopted a system whereby, although hon. Members, including myself, may have tabled questions a fortnight ago, if we were not in the top 40, our questions do not appear on the Order Paper. Is it possible to look at that, because it is causing confusion that we all want to avoid?

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry that I was not able to call the hon. Gentleman. I think that that is really the reason for his point of order. I debated with myself whether to call the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) on question 17, since we did reach it. I could have stopped there, but that would have been to the detriment of the hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). I judged that, on balance, I should call Question 17.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. With all due respect, perhaps you did not grasp the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). He was trying to say that hon. Members table oral questions to particular Ministers but their names may not appear on the Order Paper. For example, I have tabled three successive times for Energy questions and my name has never appeared on the Order Paper, and I have tabled questions for three successive Scottish Question Times and my name has never appeared on the Order Paper. Our constituents may begin to think that we are not trying to table questions. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West made a substantial point, which requires looking into. I am sure that you will see, Mr. Speaker, that hon. Members are trying to table questions to respective Ministers.

Mr. Speaker: I did get the point. The hon. Gentleman will know that there was a debate on this matter before Christmas and it was agreed that there should be an experiment on printing the first 40 questions. *[Interruption.]* Well, that is so. The Procedure Committee has the matter under review. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) has raised the substantial point that his constituents may feel that he is not tabling questions. He should put that point to the Procedure Committee which, is I have said, as currently looking into the matter, and it may come forward with an adjustment that would meet the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you, like most other

people, would agree that it is easier to decide how many angels could fit on the head of a needle rather than what triggers the Government's severe cold weather payments. Will you confirm that the Minister for Social Security, and Disabled People who is responsible for these matters and who was giggling and chatting to his neighbour during the Standing Order No. 20 application by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), has nothing to prevent him from coming to the Dispatch Box to explain to you and the House when the Government are going to stop elderly people from freezing, and when they are going to make the cold weather payments?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister was here and undoubtedly heard what was said. I cannot comment on the other matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Further to the point of order of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), Mr. Speaker. Could not questions be shown on the Order Paper on the first possible day, so that we could show our constituents? They are becoming increasingly frustrated about hon. Members from English constituencies asking two questions, whereas we can ask none. I suggest that you concentrate on Scottish Members so that names such as Lochaber——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the hon. Gentleman expect to be called during questions in which English Members are involved?

Mr. McFall *indicated assent.*

Mr. Speaker: That is right—he does, because this is a United Kingdom Parliament. I must ensure a proper balance in this place, and I seek to do so.

Disability Discrimination

3.40 pm

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to render unlawful certain kinds of discrimination on grounds of disability; and for connected purposes.

After years and years of endless rhetoric, nice noises, reams of paper and innumerable reports, there is still an astonishing degree of public and national and local government indifference to the needs of disabled people. The process of education has failed miserably and attempts to create public and establishment awareness have been lamentably unsuccessful. It has been a waste of time—especially for disabled people and their carers, whose time is of the highest premium.

Nothing short of a national scandal exists. Every hour of every day, an employer, a transport provider, a shopkeeper, Department after Department and even hospitals discriminate against disabled people. Disgracefully, public and establishment ignorance, indifference and prejudice subjects disabled people daily to the most arduous and unnecessary physically and mentally exhausting tasks. People fail to realise that carrying out the simplest, yet essential, bodily function can become an ordeal. Unlike any other member of the public, who can pop into the nearest toilet, a disabled person who does not own a toilet key under the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation scheme or who has mislaid or lost his key is in real trouble, and may be confronted with a considerable trek to obtain relief.

A constituent of mine declares that even a routine hospital visit can be a humiliating nightmare. When she is forced to leave her most essential aid at home, she becomes, as she aptly puts it, a piece of furniture that is moved on and off an ambulance and deposited at hospital into a typist's swivel chair over which she has no control.

That problem is not unique. It affects many of my constituents and the constituents of every Member of Parliament. It is the norm, which the House and the Government have failed to do anything about. The situation is worse than that, because, in their latest proclamation, the Government are setting out to erode the meagre employment benefits of disabled people. Disgracefully, the Government ignore unjustifiable discrimination, which frustrates employment opportunities for otherwise able people.

Examples of that enormous problem, which the Government choose to ignore, are available from the many organisations that represent disabled people. They have it on record that the head of one civil service department prefers the aspidistra, rubber plants and yucca plants to a disabled person in a public place. Consider the effect of that message on an employee who is forced to sit in an office unemployed because the boss of the department did not want an executive officer with cerebral palsy dealing with the public. Can hon. Members imagine the feeling of a person with an upper limb disability because of the drug thalidomide who was turned down for a job because the interviewing panel decided that the applicant could not write as her arms looked different, even though she had completed a comprehensive job application by hand?

[Mr. John Hughes]

The upset and trauma that results from such insensitivity are unimaginable. Many other reasons why disabled people are humiliated are just as extreme and disgraceful. Disabled people are rejected for jobs because the managing director's dog does not like wheelchairs. They are refused access to a company pension scheme because they have scoliosis, which is a lateral curvature of the spine and has no effect on life expectancy or ability to do a job.

Surprisingly, even the magic of money, which is normally the key to any door, fails to dent the barrier of discrimination. Even a millionaire can be discriminated against. A millionaire can go along to a Giro bank and open an account, but a disabled millionaire can forget it. Giro is not interested. The extent and form of discrimination is unbelievable.

Regrettably, I even found it necessary to draw to the attention of the House in an early-day motion the circumstances of many of my disabled or elderly constituents who were effectively imprisoned in their homes for seven weeks while a major renovation programme was carried out on the lift that served their homes. In this day and age, those circumstances are unacceptable. No elderly or disabled citizen's freedom of access, or exit from his or her home should be subject to such restriction. No elderly citizen or disabled person should be housed above ground level if the accommodation is not served by two lifts.

The needs of the disabled are of the greatest magnitude. More than 6 million people are affected. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and my right hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) have ably presented Bills on this important subject. Each Bill set out to eradicate this form of discrimination. However, even after their efforts the problem still exists. It must be tackled now. The disabled cannot wait until education has erased the prejudice that prevails in every private and Government organisation.

Ideally, the first item on the agenda of any national or local government meeting should require committee members to consider whether any other item of their business discriminates against disabled people. That could be done easily and without legislation now. That simple measure, however, cannot take care of the multitude of sins against the disabled buried in present legislation, with which we cannot afford to play around. The slate needs to be wiped clean and the present legislation replaced by one Bill only, as happened in America.

The key to the problem is here in the hands of hon. Members. My Bill sets out to establish in terms of employment, transport and access, a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability. I welcome this opportunity to present a Bill which is supported by many major organisations representing disabled people.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Hughes, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Martin Redmond, Mr. Dave Nellist, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Ms. Mildred Gordon, Mr. Frank Cook, Mr. Harry Barnes and Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Disability Discrimination

Mr. John Hughes accordingly presented a Bill to render unlawful certain kinds of discrimination on grounds of disability; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 78.]

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Training

3.49 pm

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the fact that at a time of deepening recession, with thousands more each day facing unemployment, the Government is cutting back on investment in training; believes this sends entirely the wrong signal to industry; and condemns the Government's failure to deliver the training policy Britain needs to boost skills and provide for the country's industrial future.

Let me remind the Secretary of State of the background to the debate. This year, 25,000 companies will go to the wall; this month, tens of thousands of new redundancies will be announced; last month alone, it was announced that 1,200 jobs were to go in Derby, 1,200 at British Rail Engineering Ltd., 1,000 at London Transport, 450 at Mattessons Walls and 350 at GEC, and 3,500 jobs are in jeopardy at Lewis's stores. There are countless more thousands of jobs in jeopardy up and down the country.

When the Minister speaks, I defy him to tell us that he has any reason to believe that, when he announces next week's unemployment figures, they will be any lower than the appalling 80,000 rise in unemployment announced in December. If that is right, it means that, today and every day, 3,000 more people join the dole queue. That is the reality in Britain today under the Government.

The recession is not some distant theory, it is here, it is now and it is everywhere. A short time ago, the new Prime Minister promised us a classless society; instead he has only brought us a classless recession, hitting everyone in equal measure.

Let us be clear that the distinctive feature of this recession is not that it is happening in the south and not in the north, but that it is happening everywhere—in the south-east and the south as well as in the north and in Wales and Scotland. It is affecting new technology and old, manufacturing as well as services. It is affecting every region of Britain, in every sector of industry, in every occupation at the workplace.

It is the extraordinary achievement of the Government that, having divided the nation for 11 years, they have finally united it in recession. Yet not one word of apology have we had, nor one expression of regret. We have not had one new initiative to tackle the rising unemployment that the Government have created. Let us examine the ministerial gloss that has been put on the unemployment figures by right hon. and hon. Members.

When unemployment first rose in the spring, we were told that it was

"a short period of slower growth, concentrated in the south, not the north".

In the summer, as unemployment rose higher, we were told that it was

"concentrated mainly in the south."

In the autumn, as the figures rose again and the desperation grew greater, we were given the rather implausible excuse that it was

"concentrated on men, not women."

Finally, two weeks ago, when unemployment levels had risen in every area of Britain, covering all categories of people, the Minister fell back on the final refuge of all failed Ministers. He told us that we must

"get these figures in perspective."

Let me tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman the perspective of my constituents and that of countless thousands and millions of other people. They were told that this Government had created an economic miracle, and they have not. They were told that the problems would be temporary, and they are not. They were promised that there would be no recession, and there is. Promises followed by betrayal, boom followed by burst, that is the record of this Tory Government and all Tory Governments.

The Government, having created the recession, surely cannot duck their responsibilities for the victims. Perhaps what is most devastating of all in this period of rising unemployment is that we still suffer skill shortages in vital areas of industry. In the north-east for example, a report published a few days ago said that more than 20 per cent. of firms in the region experienced shortages of skilled labour. In the north-west, where unemployment has risen by about 15,000 recently, 30 per cent. of manufacturing firms were found to have major skill shortages. In the west midlands, where unemployment has risen sharply in the past few months, the Black Country development corporation conducted a survey among more than 1,800 companies. Despite the high unemployment, it was not plant capacity but skill shortages that were inhibiting expansion.

Just a week ago—just a few days ago—the *Financial Times* told us that a report commissioned into the leather-making industry, a key area of trade which does £150 million-worth of trade every year, showed that the constraint to growth was lack of skills. Yet the chamber of commerce survey for the fourth quarter of 1990, bang up to date for last December, gave the staggering figure that over 50 per cent. of manufacturing companies and almost 50 per cent. of service companies reported recruiting difficulties. There was not a single area of the country where such companies did not suffer a shortage of skilled labour.

Can there be any more fundamental indictment of failure than that—that, at a time of rising unemployment, we still cannot provide the skilled labour we need for our future? The shortages are concentrated in the very areas in which we most need to compete effectively;, the areas where we have the largest balance of payments deficit and the areas of most acute skill shortages are correlated.

We need to train, not simply to develop people at the workplace but, crucially, for the economic success of this country.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): If the hon. Gentleman is as worried about these skills shortages as he says, perhaps he would care to tell the House why the Labour party has opposed every single training initiative since 1979. While he realises that the word for which he is groping is no, perhaps he will reflect that spending by this Government on training is exactly six times in cash terms as much as that of the Labour Government. That is the record and the case which the hon. Gentleman should answer.

Mr. Blair: That is an extraordinary intervention in a week when the hon. Gentleman's Government have

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announced the collapse of employment training, the scheme which they introduced. If he examines the comparisons between Britain and our main competitors, he will see that the areas in which we most need skills to be developed, are the very areas where skills are most lacking.

For example, in the decade up to 1988, the number of people with intermediate vocational qualifications grew by just 3 per cent. in Britain to the paltry figure of 26 per cent. That is a critical area for manufacturing and industry. In France, the figure rose by 8 per cent. to reach 40 per cent. and Germany is already 64 per cent. ahead in that category.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I give way out of generosity.

Mr. Nicholls: Why, then, has the Labour party opposed every single major training initiative since 1979? That is the question. That is what we need to hear from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blair: The subject of our debate is the Government's failure. The reason why we did not support the Government's training policy was that we disagreed with it. I should have thought that even the hon. Gentleman would realise that that is why we are debating this motion today.

If the comparitive figures are broken down, for example in the critical areas of engineering and technology, we find that an astonishing gap opens out at the craft level. In Britain every year, 35,000 craftsmen and women gain their qualifications. In France, the figure is 92,000. In Germany, the figure is 120,000. Is it any wonder, when our competitors develop their skills to so much greater a degree than us, that we have the manufacturing deficit in our trade of which we are all aware? Those figures will be confirmed by a major new study as yet unpublished, by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research into intermediate skills in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. It is worth referring to that study.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that the ex-Minister responsible for training, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), has a nerve? We are having the debate today because the Government have been a complete failure in training and this nation needs the opportunity of a proper training programme, not the programme which the hon. Gentleman pushed forward as a failed training Minister.

Mr. Blair: As I am well acquainted with the hon. Gentleman, I am not the least surprised by his nerve.

The most up-to-date comparison of numbers of technicians in manufacturing in Britain, France and Germany gives us some clue to our economic performance. Whereas Britain has 31 per cent. of technicians with no qualifications at all, France has only 27 per cent. and Germany only 8 per cent. At the critical intermediate level of those who are qualified, we find that France is about 10 or 15 per cent. ahead of Britain and Germany is producing 30 per cent. more qualified people a year.

The report goes on to study the effect of this skills gap on our companies. Based on interviews conducted with people in British industry, it concludes:

"In Britain foremen in both spinning and engineering frequently mention that crisis management, chasing missing materials, rescheduling to cope with machine breakdown or training new staff where turnover was very high and new employees were normally untrained occupied the greater part of their time."

The study goes on to compare the numbers of foremen and supervisors with qualifications in different countries. In the past decade, Britain has trained about 50,000 of them; in the same period, Germany has trained 50,000 every single year. Surely that is why we are not doing as well as we should.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Surely the statistics that the hon. Gentleman quotes so eloquently tend to show that the amount spent by this Government is broadly comparable with that spent by the other Governments he has mentioned. Unfortunately, our manufacturing industry has not spent as much of its own money on training as its European counterparts and has failed to see the advantages that it would derive from spending as much. Surely hon. Members on both sides of the House should urge industry to appreciate that.

Mr. Blair: I do not believe that that is correct, but in any event I know of no main industrial competitor that would cut its training budget at a time of rising unemployment. The hon. Gentleman should pressurise Ministers to realise that.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will a future Labour Government make an increase in the training budget an immediate priority or does the hon. Gentleman agree with the shadow Chief Secretary, who has said that the only immediate priorities for a future Labour Government would be child benefit and pensions?

Mr. Blair: What we would not do is cut the training budget at a time like this. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be worried about the 25 per cent. increase in unemployment in his constituency in the past few months.

Virtually all other international comparisons show the same trends. France and Germany have four times as many electricians as we do. Germany has five times the number of mechanical engineers and 10 times our output of trained staff in clothing and textiles. It produces 10 times the number of people qualified in office work every year. France produces seven times the number of people in the retail trade every year——

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Is not it true that the implications of what my hon. Friend is discussing are significant for large areas of this country, because, although it is important to areas such as south Wales to have inward investment, all too often it is concentrated on assembly line factories, not on primary production or research and development, which would provide real money, real jobs and real security of employment?

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is right. He mentions one of the main reasons for investing in those skills.

The comparisons in relation to virtually every sector of industry are frightening. If we agree that we need a training revolution, surely it must start with our young people. However, in such training we have the biggest gap with the very countries with which we need to catch up. Britain is virtually the only country that is cutting capital spending on schools as a real percentage of GDP. It is the

only country in the industrialised world with fewer than 40 per cent. of young people staying on in higher education and training.

If young people were leaving school and going into first-class training, that would give some satisfaction. There are 300,000 or more young people on the youth training scheme. On the Government's own figures, fewer than half of those receive a proper qualification at the end of the training. More than 50 per cent. of the young people employed, unemployed or in employment outside YTS receive no training whatever.

At the very time when that is happening in Britain, Germany will this year increase the number of apprenticeships to almost 2 million. Now we can see why this country has fallen behind. Against a background of rising unemployment, skill shortages and a skills deficit in vital areas of trade, we look to see how the Government are responding.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): The hon. Gentleman finds it difficult to answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). Would extra spending by a Labour Government be a priority or would it come about as resources allowed?

Mr. Blair: The answer is obviously yes. If the hon. Gentleman had been here for the speech by the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), he would have heard him say exactly that. Of course that is one of our priorities. The Government are betraying the future of the country by cutting skills.

The Government say that, because fewer young people are coming on to the Labour market, they want to cut expenditure on training. On our calculations, the youth training budget will be cut in real terms by about £100 million over the next few years. If that is because fewer young people are coming on to the labour market, would not any sensible Government, given the state of qualifications among our young people, reallocate that money and provide better quality training? The real dereliction concerns the 100,000 young people who leave school every year, go to work and receive no training whatever. In other countries it would be unthinkable—indeed, unlawful—for that to happen.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Blair: I shall not give way. I should be happy to educate the hon. Gentleman, but this is a debate, not a seminar.

There is growing support for Labour's policy of some form of intervention for young people that would put training within a proper legislative framework and ensure that public money provided decent training and proper qualifications. We are today beginning a new process of consultation on our proposal with training and enterprise councils, industry and unions. Why does not the Secretary of State do that? He should consult people to see whether there is support for proper legislation to ensure that young people are helped.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, who is now dealing with TECs. I am a great supporter of TECs, and I understood that the hon. Gentleman also supported them. When he was recently out of the country, his hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) gave an interview on, I think, Radio Sheffield, and deliberately rubbished TECs. Is the Labour party in favour of TECs or not?

Mr. Blair: That is complete nonsense, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) will tell us.

The cuts in youth training are bad enough, but those in training for the unemployed are savage. Some 30 per cent., or £300 million, will be taken out of the budget for training the unemployed next year alone. Thousands of those presently receiving training will be denied it. Would any other Government, at a time of rising unemployment, when training and retraining have never been more important, cut and savage the budget for training the unemployed?

We are proffered the reason that the Government have discovered that training is not always the best thing for the unemployed. I have only two things to say to that. First, that is a mighty curious thing to say. I remember when the predecessor of the Secretary of State for Employment introduced employment training. He told us that the reason why it had to be introduced, replacing the community programme, was because training was what the long-termed unemployed required. What has changed? Did he decide that training was no longer necessary and make the budget cut, or did he agree the cut in the budget and then cast around for an excuse to justify it?

Secondly, in all the criticisms of employment training and in all the campaigns to change it, and in all the studies and reports of its inadequacies—including those of the South Derby TEC and the Manchester TEC, which published reports last year, that of the Select Committee on Employment, which published a report last year, and the Department's evaluation study, no one has ever said that the problem with employment training was that there was too much of it.

When we see the cuts in youth training and employment training, we are entitled to look for some help in training for those already in work. It is here that we find the most serious gaps in Government policy. We know that, in the year 2000, 80 per cent. of those in the work force now will still be employed. We know that, in a recession, training will always be cut. A recent CBI survey shows a declining trend of those companies still wanting to invest more in training. There is no proper policy for in-work training whatever, apart from exhortation.

The Secretary of State has endorsed the standard, developed by industry, unions and others, of investors in people. He has endorsed the kite mark for training excellence, which is given to employers who have proper training plans drawn up in consultation with their work force, involving each employee in the upgrading of his or her skill and evaluated or costed according to a universal standard. His predecessor set out as a Government target the aim that, by 31 December 1995—less than five years away—all employers, large or small, should become investors in people.

Why can the Secretary of State not accept what the Labour party urges—that he will not succeed in that target by exhortation alone? If all that were required were persuasion, even these Ministers could have succeeded long ago. Even if he cannot accept our case on that, he should have retained the Department of Employment budget so as to find other ways to use that money to stimulate training. Are we really saying that, with some

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imagination, we could not have put together a programme for management training, for a crash course for TECs to deal with skilled shortages, for improving the profile for national vocational qualifications? Any of these things could have been done, with foresight, imagination and a restored budget.

At a time of recession, investment in skills must be maintained and increased. Is that not the case that the Government take out to industry day after day? How can the Secretary of State expect industry to heed his call to keep up its training investment when the Government set a bad example by cutting their training investment, as we can see from the recently announced figures? Only a Tory Government could have allowed Britain, the one country with the unlooked-for bonus of North sea oil, the one country with the God-given means to invest in skills and training and to prepare for our future, to be the one country that, before the single European market takes effect, will cut training investment. That is why we condemn the Government.

The Government are not merely not investing in training; they are incapable of understanding that training policy cannot be a response to the short-term changes in the labour market. The essence of any training policy is that it should plan for the long term. It is not simply that long-term planning is incompatible with the Government's dogmatic obsession with market forces: it is that it requires a different attitude of government, a different culture in industry, a different relationship between Government and industry.

The Government's failures in respect of training are not just those of policy, gross though they are; they are fundamental failures of leadership on a vital issue for our industrial future. If the Secretary of State really meant what he said about supporting our idea for a training revolution, he would be a spectator, not an extra in the crowd. He would be leading that revolution, creating the partnership in industry necessary to achieve it, using the power of government to legislate for our young people, providing the incentive for employers to upgrade skills, extending his Department's training initiatives.

Other countries are not standing still. Between 1988 and 1990, when we have lost some £1,000 million from our training budget, French expenditure on training will rise by about 30 per cent. in real terms. In Italy it is also rising. We are not struggling to catch up with our competitors parked by the roadside. The distance that we have to travel is not between us and some fixed point. We have to catch up with a vehicle that is moving ahead fast, with the driver's foot on the accelerator. When we consider where we are and where we need to be, we can see that we are not even in the right business of getting our skills training right.

The activities of our competitors are the product not just of their national pride but of economic necessity, because they know that the world of work is changing. This is the age in which the person in the workplace will become the pivot upon which the success of the enterprise turns. It is not just that we face skill shortages at a time of rising unemployment; it is not only that that is in the areas in which we most directly need to compete: it is in those very areas that the demand for skilled labour will grow.

Any analysis of occupations in the future shows that it will be in the professional occupations, the skilled manual occupations, that employment will grow, and it is in the unskilled jobs that it will fall. Most other countries know that. They appreciate that the markets of the future will be high-value-added markets where the advanced technology is applied by the most skilled people. The technology revolution of the 1960s will give way to the people revolution of the 1990s. The products from Japan and Germany are increasingly customised, individualised, precision goods, leaving mass production to other, less-developed nations.

How long will it be before we have debates in the House where the adverse comparisons that we make are not with Germany, France and Japan but with Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Indonesia? That must not be allowed to happen, yet it is happening under this Government. It is because of that, because they have no answers to the recession or the problems that lie beneath it, because they have mismanaged the short term and failed the long term, that Britain needs a new start with new policies for the new challenges we face, one which combines commitment and a sense of urgency. The Government will never complete the task. That will be left to a Labour Government.

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the Government's creation of a climate and strategic framework which is encouraging employers to improve their already substantial role in the national training effort, in which participation in training and the attainment of skills is rising, and which is set fair to meet the United Kingdom's skill needs in the 1990s and beyond.'.

We have had this afternoon from the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) the usual litany of woe which he brings to our debates on this subject.

The Government's training policy is designed precisely to achieve the objectives that are set out in the Opposition's motion—the need to boost Britain's skills and to provide for our industrial future. We are addressing those objectives, we are succeeding in achieving them, and the hon. Gentleman's speeches would have a good deal more credibility if he were to recognise and give credit for the extent to which that is the case.

If hon. Members want to test the truth of what I have just said, all they need do is take as their text a speech made last week by the hon. Member for Sedgefield. In that speech, he set out the policy of the Labour party towards the training of young people. He said that training should be based on qualifications gained, not on time served. That is precisely our policy. It is a policy that we have put into effect. Since last spring, youth training has imposed no time limit on the training offered to young people and has been designed to ensure that those who complete it reach a minimum qualification.

The hon. Gentleman also said that qualifications for young people undertaking training should be certified by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. I agree. Great progress towards the achievement of a national vocational qualification for every young person in training is already being made. In fact, more than two thirds of those who complete youth training already gain a vocational qualification.

The hon. Gentleman also called for closer integration of education and training. Almost 10 years ago, the Government launched the technical and vocational education initiative to achieve precisely the aim of bringing education and training closer together. We did so at a time when the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), then his party spokesman on education—I am delighted that he is with us—was parading up and down the country denouncing vocational education as fit only for second-class citizens and appropriate—he has always had the gift for a phrase—only for

"hewers of wood and drawers of water".

That was the phrase used by the Leader of the Opposition about TVEI. But I am always delighted to welcome late converts to the truth, and I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman recognises the merits of what we are doing.

It would be difficult to gain the impression from the speech that we have just heard by the hon. Member for Sedgefield that most of the policies which he advocates on youth training are already in place. Yet that is the fact: we have given all 16 and 17-year-olds a right to training if they want it—the only country in Europe to do so. No such right existed under the last Labour Government.

The fact is that nine out of 10 of our 16-year-olds are today undertaking education or training—an improvement of a third since Labour was in power. We will have in place by the end of next year a system of vocational qualifications covering 80 per cent. of the occupations in Britain, which will offer every worker in those occupations a ladder of opportunity which they can climb rung by rung and which will make it possible for them to train towards a qualification.

Of course, the availability of a national system of job-related qualifications is relevant not only to our young people but to our adult population, employed and unemployed, and there is a mass of evidence that our people are taking full advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Before my right hon. and learned Friend leaves recent speeches by Labour Members and the speech of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), can he tell us whether there was any mention in that speech of the Labour party's decision to levy on every employer a large slice of turnover, to be given to bureaucracy, who would meddle yet again in training which ought to be done by employers?

Mr. Howard: I was astonished by the total failure of the hon. Member for Sedgefield to say a word in his speech about the training levy, which he announced just two days ago and of which our newspapers yesterday were full. The reason why he did not say anything about it today might be that the Leader of the Opposition was sitting on the Front Bench. On 4 April last year, the Leader of the Opposition dropped the levy from his party's policy. Two days ago, we heard that the hon. Member for Sedgefield was bringing it back. No doubt because the leader of his party was sitting next to him, he did not feel able to say a word about it today.

Employers are spending about £20 billion a year on training. The number of employees that they trained increased by about 70 per cent. between 1984 and 1989. The new training and enterprise councils are two years ahead of schedule, with 1,200 business people of the highest calibre engaged in an unprecedented partnership with Government.

We launched a major new initiative, "investors in people", which will increase employer commitment to training still further in the years ahead, and which, I was happy to note, obtained the enthusiastic endorsement of the hon. Member for Sedgefield in his remarks on Monday.

Most encouraging of all, perhaps, the latest Confederation of British Industry quarterly trends survey indicated that, even in these difficult times, more than four times as many companies intend to maintain or increase their investment in training as intend to reduce it. If ever there was evidence that we are succeeding in revolutionising employers' attitudes to training, that survey proves it.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Opposition's confusion over levies is mirrored—despite the remarks of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) in response to my earlier intervention in respect of training and enterprise councils. The hon. Gentleman denied that there was any lack of support for TECs among members of the Opposition Front Bench, but, on 30 December 1990, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) said on BBC Radio Sheffield that TECs placed

"a completely false emphasis on the nation's needs."

Is it not the case that the same Opposition confusion exists in respect of TECs as it does in respect of levies?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. Confusion runs through all Labour party training policies, and I shall comment later on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish).

Dr. Kim Howells: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman completely satisfied with the nation's training? If so, is that the cause of the complacency that has led to his decision to cut the money available for that activity?

Mr. Howard: I confess to some disappointment, because I had hoped that the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) was about to clear up the confusion surrounding the Opposition's policies. Of course there is more to be done with training, and of course we are in the middle of a revolution that is not yet complete. Of course we must do more to transform the attitudes of employers and individuals. Nevertheless, we ought to acknowledge that progress has already been made, and that the right policies are in place to continue and to complete that progress.

Mr. Blair: Does the Secretary of State agree with his predecessor's comment: "We have a mountain to climb"? If so, why is he cutting training expenditure?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a moment, I will address that point.

Of course the Government also have a crucial part to play. Expenditure by my Department—as my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) pointed out—has risen from the £377 million a year spent by Labour when in office to £2·6 billion a year today—six times more in cash terms, and two and a half times more in real terms. That is why we increased the planned spending on youth training for the coming year. That is why we welcome with enthusiasm the undoubted improvement in the quality of training that has occurred.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): Much of the criticism so far has centred on the Government's failure to spend enough on training. Will the right hon. and learned

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

Gentleman comment on reports that criticised the administrative procedures used by some TECs, whose consequences included mispayments? That is an important matter, whatever the overall issue. Can the Secretary of State give the average cost for each non-vocational qualification course, to level 3 or equivalent? Some very high figures have been circulated.

Mr. Howard: On the first of the hon. Gentleman's questions, he will appreciate that the deficiencies to which he referred were identified by the audit arrangements, which were instituted by my Department. The information which became available a few days ago is evidence of the effectiveness of those audit arrangements. They will continue to remain in place, and those weaknesses will be remedied, because the TECs will improve their administrative arrangements to ensure that those difficulties do not recur. That is already happening.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I am sure that that is what the Minister wants to happen. One of the worries about TECs is that, once one is in place, there are precious few ways in which Ministers can regain control of the organisation if it is badly managed. That is partly because, in effect, it is a self-perpetuating organisation. How does the Minister intend to exert control on TECs which are making the sort of mistakes—deliberate or otherwise—which appear to have been revealed by the Government's audit?

Mr. Howard: The audit arrangements will continue, and TECs will continue to have to operate in accordance with the contracts that they signed with me. A considerable range of monitoring arrangements exist to ensure that they continue to provide the high-quality training that we intend them to provide.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge said in his intervention, each and every initiative which has led to the improvements in training in this country in recent years has been opposed by the Opposition. They opposed the technical and vocational education initiative when it was launched. They opposed employment training at their 1988 party conference, and called on their local authorities to boycott it, which 13 Labour-controlled local authorities did. Now the Opposition admit that they were wrong and they seek to pose as the defenders of employment training.

The Opposition opposed training and enterprise councils when they were announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who is in the Chamber today. Now they admit that they were wrong and they support them—at least, the hon. Member for Sedgefield says they support them. In a moment, we shall consider the extent to which the Opposition speak with one voice on training and enterprise councils.

Time and time again, the Opposition have simply copied our policies, after a respectable period of time has elapsed, and ditched their own. This week the hon. Member for Sedgefield placed our "investors in people" initiative at the centre of his latest proposals.

The hon. Member spoke at length about the alterations in training funding that we should be making from next April. Not surprisingly for him, he did not refer once to the significant increase that we shall be making in planned spending on youth training. He did not refer to the transfer of responsibility and money for work-related further education to the training and enterprise councils, and he left out altogether any reference to the important additional flexibilities that will be given to TECs to increase the value for the taxpayer of the investment that we are making in training.

Perhaps that is because the hon. Gentleman agrees with his five Front-Bench colleagues, who signed an early-day motion a few weeks ago, describing as "disasters" those flexibilities requested by training and enterprise councils —and warmly welcomed by TECs.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Could the Minister explain the flexibilities that he gave to skill centres when he handed over £14 million to his friends and to friends of the Tory party, which resulted in the flexibility to close down a fair proportion of the skill centres, to sell off the sites, because they were also handed over free and gratis, and to sell off the machinery, other training equipment and facilities? What benefit is that for skill training?

Mr. Howard: We transferred skill centres, which had been making a substantial loss for some time, to the private sector because we were convinced that that was the way in which they could provide more efficient training than they had previously made available. The evidence is that that is precisely what has happened.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield mentioned changes in funding of employment training. The fact of the matter is that he does not have a leg to stand on when it comes to discussing funding. We might be able to take what he says a little more seriously if he had succeeded in persuading the shadow Chief Secretary that training would be one of the areas on which Labour would immediately increase spending. He constantly tried to give the impression that that would be the case. However, we know that it is not the case: the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) keeps telling us that it is not the case; the Leader of the Opposition keeps telling us that it is not the case. Training, they tell us, is something on which they hope to spend more as resources allow. I fear, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if a Labour Government ever returned to power and you were waiting for "resources to allow" you would have to be very patient.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Does the Secretary of State realise that, in Renfrewshire, our young folk were guaranteed a training place? That has never come about, however. The places cannot be filled. Does he also realise that the money to finance training for my constituents has been cut?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the youth training guarantee. That guarantee applies and will continue to apply, and young people who cannot find jobs will continue to be guaranteed a training place. As I said earlier, this is the only country in Europe to guarantee two years' training for all 16 and 17-year-old school leavers who cannot find jobs.

We have explained many times the reasons behind our decision to alter the funding of employment training next year. I do not expect Opposition Members to understand, because to them the unemployed remain a mass of undifferentiated people to be lumped into a category, used for political purposes and treated as a lumpen proletariat.

We take a different attitude. We believe that the unemployed deserve to be treated as individuals, and we want to give them individual help. That is why, for the first

time, since January this year every person who signs on at an unemployment benefit office is interviewed for up to three-quarters of an hour, and receives an individual back-to-work plan tailored to his individual circumstances and showing him the best route back to work.

That is why we have taken heed of the detailed studies that we have conducted into the local labour markets in Bristol, London and the west midlands, which clearly showed that a significant proportion of the long-term unemployed already possessed the qualifications to match the vacancies in their areas. It has become very clear that, for many people, a lack of skills is not the prime obstacle to finding a job: for many, the main difficulty is lack of morale or lack of motivation. That is why we are determined to provide the unemployed with the widest possible range of help to assist them to return to work as quickly as possible.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): The Secretary of State has mentioned attitudes to the unemployed, and the way in which they are treated as a homogeneous mass. Will he explain why, in September 1982, the Government —for some inexplicable reason—stopped conducting an occupational analysis of the unemployed and keeping the statistics?

Mr. Howard: I must confess that my memory of these matters does not go back to September 1982. If the hon. Gentleman was listening to what I was saying, however, and understanding the information that a range of help was now available for people who had lost their jobs, he will know that that range is wider than it has ever been before.

Because we want to ensure that we provide a wide range of help, we shall be increasing the number of places at job clubs, and in the job interview guarantee scheme, by up to 100,000 next year. Employment training, on which we shall still be spending £750 million next year, will have an important part to play. Training, however, is not the only, or always the best, way in which we can help people without jobs back into the world of work.

You would never guess, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the language of the Opposition, that those who lost their jobs when unemployment doubled under the last Labour Government had no access to employment training or a restart interview, no chance of a place in a job club, no prospect of assistance through the job interview guarantee scheme and no guarantee of an in-depth interview with a new client adviser as soon as they registered as unemployed. The present Government introduced this comprehensive package of assistance for the unemployed, and created the conditions for a record number of jobs —2 million more than existed in 1979. The present Government have presided over the creation of more jobs in recent years than any other European Community Government.

It is, of course, the case that at the heart of our policy on training lie the training and enterprise councils. These councils provide a direct solution to the problem that has plagued Britain's training performance for the last two centuries—the difficulty of securing active employer involvement and commitment to training. The Labour party believes that it is possible to achieve employment commitment to training only by taxing employers, by penalising employers and by legislating against employers. At the very most, such negative policies could only secure grudging employer involvement, and would generate great resentment amongst them.

Mr. Blair *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. Is he abandoning the levy announcement that he made as recently as Monday? If not, what is the levy but a tax on employers?

Mr. Blair: What we are saying is that the "investors in people" standard can be made to work, and the target set out by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor met, only if those employers who do not meet it make some contribution to overall training, and those who do meet it do not make a contribution.

Mr. Howard: Of course it will be a tax. Or will it be a voluntary contribution? What on earth is a compulsory contribution except a tax? Policies of compulsion—perhaps "compulsory contributions" is the phrase that we should use—were tried in this country in the 1960s and the 1970s, and they failed. They led to a climate in which employers were forced into training by numbers and mindless form-filling in order to avoid levies.

The hon. Gentleman need not take my word for it. These are the words of the CBI just last month:

"The CBI members continue to reject the use of statutory measures as a means of increasing training activity. No legislative approaches have been devised that relate training to business needs."

Coercing employers is not the way to secure the full-hearted and genuine commitment to training that we need if we are to secure the high levels of skills that will be very important in the years ahead.

Training and enterprise councils provide the solution. They engage employers because they are led by employers; they have an impact with those working in the private sector because they are private sector bodies; and they can deliver increased commitment to training from employers because they are led by employers with a demonstrated commitment to training themselves.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The Secretary of State talks about getting a more active commitment from employers via the TEC mechanism. Would he care to comment on the case of the South Glamorgan TEC, which covers my constituency? The chairman of that body—Mr. Helliwell, of the building company William Cowlin and Sons—asked one of the civil servants who had been loaned to the TEC to shred the two tenders submitted in competition with that from his own firm to build the TEC's offices. The contract is worth about £450,000.

Is that what the Secretary of State means when he talks about getting more active involvement by employers in the affairs of the TECs? Can he tell us what the outcome of this case will be? I understand that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales had to ring up Mr. Helliwell and tell him not only that his firm should not proceed with its now winning tender, the other two having been shredded by his civil servants—reluctantly, obviously, but on instruction from the chairman of the TEC—but that it should not take part in the re-tendering processes suggested by the Secretary of State for Wales in direct communication with Mr. Helliwell.

Mr. Howard: I have no detailed knowledge of the circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman refers. What

[Mr. Howard]

is the purport of his question? Is he suggesting that that is a basis for opposing the development of TECs? Is he suggesting that opposing TECs should therefore be the policy of his party? If so, he should have a word with the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

Mr. Morgan: The point that I am making is that there are limits to the degree of freedom that employers may be given to run organisations that spend public money. If the Secretary of State's Department were to set up a more efficient monitoring organisation to watch what is happening in the TECs, we should be much happier about the expenditure of public money by private sector organisations, which he seems to think is the be-all and end-all of policy making in this field.

Mr. Howard: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have effective monitoring arrangements and that we shall make sure that TECs behave in accordance with the contract that they have signed and in accordance with the high standards that we expect of them.

Mr. Morgan: High standards?

Mr. Howard: Yes, high standards.

Already, training and enterprise councils have secured greater employer involvement in training at a senior level than has ever been achieved before in this country. More than 1,200 of the most important business people in the country have committed themselves to their local TECs. By last October every TEC had entered at least its development phase, completing the national network two years ahead of the schedule we set in 1988. In fact, 51 of the 82 across the country are already operational.

I am the first to welcome expressions of support for Government policy from the Opposition, so I am delighted that the hon. Member for Sedgefield has gone on record repeatedly in support of training and enterprise councils. But it is a pity that his enthusiasm is not always shared by his own Front-Bench team. No sooner had the hon. Member told the "Today" programme on Radio 4 that TECs were important because of the extent of employer commitment to them than his Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Fife, Central, launched what will no doubt go down in the history of these matters as his Sheffield initiative.

On 13 December the hon. Gentleman went to Sheffield. His first call was at a trade union meeting organised by those in the Department of Employment who were understandably concerned about the consequences for their jobs of the changes that we are making in the way in which training is organised.

We all know that the first rule of Labour party politics is that, when a Labour spokesman is addressing a trade union audience, he tells them what they want to hear. The hon. Member for Fife, Central behaved like a model Labour party spokesman when he went to Sheffield on 13 December. He told the trade union meeting that he regarded TECs as "new and unproven", and he urged the Government to "ease up" on the speed of their introduction. He said that the Labour party was opposed to the reductions in the size of the national administrative staff—reductions that are, of course, an inevitable consequence of a move to a locally based system. He supported the criticisms of the new financial flexibilities granted by the Government to training and enterprise councils at their request, made by some 60 Labour Members of Parliament, including five Front-Bench spokesmen, in an early-day motion in November last year.

The hon. Gentleman's second call was at BBC Radio Sheffield. By the time he got there, his blood was up. He said that the Government were moving far too quickly in establishing TECs, which he considered to be

"a completely false emphasis on the nation's needs."

I do not know how significant it is that the hon. Member for Sedgefield was out of the country on 13 December. I do not know how much this episode really was a case of "when the cat's away, the mouse will play", but I do think that the House and the country are entitled to a clear explanation of who it is that speaks for the Labour party on these matters. Which is the authentic voice of the Opposition? Is it the hon. Member for Sedgefield, the pro-TEC Dr. Jekyll? Or is it the hon. Member for Fife, Central, the anti-TEC Mr. Hyde? Or is it simply that the party is in favour of TECs when the hon. Member for Sedgefield is in the country but against them whenever he goes abroad?

I have already outlined the progress that we have made in providing training opportunities for our young people.

Mr. Blair: Perhaps the Minister would like to say whether he agrees with this comment in *The Economist* a couple of weeks ago:

"Almost two years after its launch, to the sound of grandiloquent claims from Tory Ministers and loud cheers from businessmen, the Department of Employment's market-led training policy is in danger of falling apart."

Mr. Howard: I do not agree with that comment in *The Economist*, but the person who wrote the article does not sit beside me on the Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman might expect rather more sympathy and support from his colleagues who sit beside him.

In less than three months, we shall be launching training vouchers in 11 pilot areas. In those areas every school leaver will be issued with a voucher, worth an average of £1,500, with which they will be able to purchase any approved training course of their choice. They will be able to use their voucher with an employer, at a further education college or at any other local training provider approved by the relevant training and enterprise council.

Training vouchers directly address the issue of increasing the proportion of our young people who receive training. They define very clearly the difference between the Government and the Labour party. We want to encourage young people by giving them choice and by giving them control over resources. We will give them the very best advice and guidance available, but we will then leave it up to them to make their own decisions.

The Labour party, on the other hand, wants to force young people to fit into the pattern that it would design for them. It would close down opportunities to those young people who wish to pursue careers which do not require training from the very beginning, and it has no interest at all in transferring control of resources from the national to the local level, let alone into the hands of young people themselves.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The Secretary of State has made a welcome announcement. To give real freedom of choice, will he also pay an allowance

to youngsters staying on at school after 16? It is important that many youngsters stay on at school, and we should not just pay them money and bribe them to leave school.

Mr. Howard: It is important that young people should stay at school and, as the hon. Gentleman will know, they are doing so in increasing numbers. The voucher is designed to pay for training and not for anything else, so the hon. Gentleman's comparison is inappropriate.

I have already referred to the astonishing omission from the hon. Member for Sedgefield's speech of his proposal, repeated earlier this week, for a training levy. If we look at the history of total confusion on this issue, we shall understand why he decided that it would be prudent to remain silent.

The story begins in November 1986, when the Labour party's then employment spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), committed his party to introducing a training levy of 1 per cent. on the turnover of all companies. Two days later, he was flatly contradicted by the then shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who ruled out such a levy by saying:

"I can't imagine it's going to be the policy."

It was not long before the Leader of the Opposition tried to perform his usual act of reconciling the irreconcilable. On 20 March 1987 the right hon. Gentleman said

"A levy on turnover would not be appropriate in many industries."

That was the "maybe a levy" stage in the evolution of the Labour party's policy. By the time we get to 1989, we find a different levy. In "Meet the Challenge—Make the Change", we read that a major source of funding for the national training fund will be a contribution by all enterprises of 0·5 per cent. of payroll, to be known as the training investment contribution.

Just a few months later, on 6 February 1990, the hon. Members for Sedgefield and for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) launched a new policy document covering technology which did not mention the levy at all. In March last year, in another document, "Investing in Britain's Future", there was again complete silence about the levy.

On 22 March last year, in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Circencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East brought the levy back. He said that it was still a part of the Labour party's proposals. That was affirmed later that month by the hon. Member for Sedgefield in a debate on training.

On 5 April last year, the Leader of the Opposition re-entered the fray. *The Independent* of that date said:

"Labour's plans to impose a £1·25 billion job tax on company payrolls to help finance the national training programme were quietly dropped yesterday. The unheralded climbdown was made by the Leader of the Opposition".

A month later the Labour party produced yet another document, which made a proposal for a different levy. It said:

"A purely voluntary approach will not work. We will therefore set employers . . . an initial minimum of 0·5 per cent. of their payroll to invest in high quality training to clear and agreed standards."

Yesterday there was yet a further version of a levy, this time tied up with investment in training.

Those dizzying changes of direction make the Labour party look ridiculous. The hon. Member for Sedgefield resembles nothing so much as a spinning top, and it is not surprising that he omitted all reference to the levy from his speech.

I want to make a serious offer to the Labour party, which is directly relevant to the question of skills shortages to which the hon. Member for Sedgefield referred. There is one thing that we need above all if we are to succeed in transforming the skills performance of our country in the decade ahead. We need to make sure that the attainment of relevant skills is suitably rewarded. That means recognising the importance of differentials in pay.

There is not a great deal that Government can do to help achieve that objective, but there is an enormous amount that the Government can do to hinder it. Nothing would hinder it more than the introduction of the minimum wage to which the Labour party is so devoted. On even modest assumptions about consequential effects on differentials, a minimum wage as proposed by the Labour party would lose 750,000 jobs. They can only deny the validity of that estimate by suggesting that no attempt would be made to maintain differentials after a minimum wage was introduced. If that were to happen, it would sound the death knell of our hopes for improving the skills of the British people. If the Labour party is serious about the need to improve skills, it will abandon its proposals for a minimum wage. The two objectives are utterly inconsistent.

There is a very clear choice on the issue of training lying before the House and the British people. It is a choice between a Government who set the pace on training and an Opposition who struggle to catch up. It is a choice between a Government committed to work in partnership with British employers and an Opposition pledged to work against them. It is a choice between a Government who have already delivered a massive increase in spending on training and an Opposition unable to comment on their spending plans.

It is a choice between a Government committed to expanding training choices and opportunities for our young people and an Opposition determined to conscript them into a rigid framework. It is a choice between a Government determined to deliver training on a local basis, matched to local needs, and an Opposition pledged to centralise, regulate and nationalise. Above all, it is a choice between a Government who have already delivered the most significant improvements in this nation's training performance in our history and who have put in place the policy for a dramatic leap forward in our national training performance in the 1990s—and an Opposition condemned by their own blinkered ignorance to a policy mish-mash of cheap imitation and impractical extremism.

Training is a serious business. It requires a serious Government, certain of the way forward and committed to work with every part of our society to deliver improvements in our training performance. There is only one party in the House and the nation able to form such a Government. That is why we shall stay on the Government Benches long after the next general election.

4.57 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): In the war in the Gulf we are continually told two things about our service men. We are told about the quality of their equipment and the standard of their training and that a

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land battle will not begin until the troops are adequately trained. Training makes for success or failure, victory or defeat.

There is another war that is possibly more important and of greater long-term significance for the future of this country and that is the battle for economic survival in an increasingly competitive world. Our responsibility is to give our people the best equipment and training for that battle. We are not doing so. We are failing our people. While our competitors forge ahead with state-of-the-art, high-tech equipment, investment in Britain is negative. Our training is woefully and scandalously inadequate. We are sending our people into the battle of economic competition with one arm tied behind their back. We have the worst educated and trained work force in the industrialised world. We have a staggering skills shortage alongside large-scale unemployment, often in those industries where the balance of payments deficit is greatest.

That failure is deep-seated. More than a century ago, in 1884, the Royal Commission on technical instruction said:

"Neglect of training is the key reason for Britain's lack of competitiveness."

There has been a history of failure and neglect.

One country that we must match is Germany. In simple industries such as furniture, nine tenths of German workers have served a three-year, externally examined apprenticeship, whereas in Britain the figure is fewer than one in 10. Is it any wonder that German productivity is 60 per cent. higher than ours and that much of the kitchen furniture sold in this country is made in Germany? Hon. Members may have noticed that high-quality garments and textiles also bear the "Made in Germany" tag. Eighty per cent. of German machinists have served a three-year apprenticeship, but hardly any British machinist has done so.

The same is true in virtually every other trade, such as the hotel trade. German sales assistants have product knowledge. One rarely meets a British shop assistant who is able to explain what he is selling. Countries such as Germany are not standing still, but are making progress all the time and at a much faster rate than us. They have three, four or five times as many skilled workers, which gives them an enormous competitive advantage.

We have fallen behind not only European countries but countries of the Pacific and the Pacific ring. We face not only the powerful economy of Japan, but countries such as South Korea, which hopes that by the end of this decade 80 per cent. of its young people will reach university entrance standards. We are hoping for 30 per cent. The position is dire. The industrialised world is undergoing a technological revolution. Evidence that the Select Committee on Employment has received shows that in the next decade between 70 and 80 per cent. of new jobs will require brain not muscle power, and that almost half of them—roughly 40 per cent.—will require brain skills equal to a university degree or its equivalent. Unless we take drastic action, the revolution will pass us by.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): May I attempt to correct an often-quoted mistake in the interpretation of the higher education figures, which I recall from my previous responsibilities for education? The hon. Gentleman is comparing the proportion of our young people who enter higher education with that in other countries. A relatively low proportion enter higher education in Britain because we have a selective system of entry, unlike other countries, where everyone who attains the equivalent of our A-level has a right to higher education. The benefit of our system is that people do not drop out of it; more stay in higher education than elsewhere. The proportion of our young people who graduate with degrees and diplomas is one of the highest in the world.

Mr. Leighton: I am always interested to hear the hon. Gentleman on these matters, on which he is an expert. I hope that he is not being complacent. The figures that I have show that at the end of the decade about 30 per cent. of British youngsters will achieve university entrance standards, whereas South Korea is aiming for 80 per cent. The point that I am making is that we are falling behind not only western Europe but the countries of the Pacific and that, because we do not grasp the gravity of the problem, we are in danger of falling further behind. We led the first industrial revolution, but I fear that unless we take more drastic action we shall fall behind and be relegated to the low-wage, low-productivity third division of nations. The relative decline in the British economy is accelerating and it will be extremely difficult to reverse.

Surely the facts are known; our failure in training has been analysed to death. There has been a stream of reports, which we all know about, but what are we going to do? The Government's record is hopelessly inadequate. The ever-worsening skills gap surely is testimony to their failure. We have had YOPS, TOPS, the community programme, the youth training scheme, and the new JTS and ET. All those measures were much trumpeted, but most of them have been scrapped. All were underfunded, largely cosmetic and had as much to do with massaging the unemployment figures as with training.

We had the Manpower Services Commission, which was a tripartite body. The Government dislike tripartite bodies and are hostile to unions. They robbed the MSC of its independence, leaned on it, gave it instructions and treated it like a puppet. They kicked the trade union representatives off it, swamped it with employers and killed it.

Next, we had the Training Agency, but the Government killed that. We now have no national body with overall responsibility for training. The industrial training boards have been abolished, and in their place we have small and weak industry training organisations, which again are under-resourced. The unions are being kept out. They are neglected and few people know that those organisations exist.

After two or three years of further upheaval and reorganisation, training and enterprise councils were introduced. The launch of the TECs was accompanied by substantial reductions in funding. As the Secretary of State knows, there was disappointment among business men on TECs and they expressed their doubts and despondency. They felt that the reduction in funding undermined the credibility of the Government's commitment. What a way to start an initiative. What a way to launch the TECs—greatly to reduce the funding available.

If we are to achieve world-class results, it will cost money. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) pointed out, the training budget of the Department of Employment has been cut every year since

1986-87. Provision for next year is three quarters the amount for 1986-87 in real terms. Provision for ET this year is 29 per cent. down on last year and next year there will be a further cut of 34 per cent. Next year's resources devoted to ET will be less than half the total of two years ago.

Employers have been complaining about the cuts. I shall mention the industry with which I am connected—the printing industry. I had dinner last night with the British Printing Industries Federation, the body which represents printing employers. It said that reports in the national press on 29 January of a reduction of £79 million in the youth training budget for 1991-92 confirms its worse fears. In 1987, as a national managing agent, the BPIF was able to offer grants to companies of nearly £28 a week. In a briefing, it says:

"As a direct result of reductions in Government expenditure on YT, we are currently able to offer only £16 a week. Allowing for the effects of inflation between 1987 and 1990, the grants have been eroded by 54 per cent. in real terms. The incentive value of the grants is already weak. A further cut . . . combined with the effects of inflation, would almost certainly rule out any BPIF participation in future."

That is the printing employers. Cuts have made them so despondent that they are likely to opt out, resulting in the elimination of 1,200 high-quality training placements each year—a significant loss not only to the printing industry but to the new TECs. If the Secretary of State does not take any notice of what I say to him, I hope that he will listen to the printing employers.

We all wish the TECs well, if only because they are the only show in town. The best that can be said of them is that they are unproven. We cannot say what they have done because they are only just coming into existence. They have not done anything yet, so they are still unproven. Their chief feature is that they are employer-led. Of course we must involve employers, but this is where the scepticism comes in. Can training be left to employers? What has stopped them training hitherto? No one has prevented them from doing so. The yawning skills gap, of which we are all aware, exists precisely because employers failed us in the past. Many employers can see no further than their noses. They regard training as an expendable overhead. It goes first when times get hard. They take a short-term view. Many prefer to poach rather than to train employees

Dr. Kim Howells: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are employers who recognise the importance of training and have good training programmes? Does not that reinforce his remark that all too often they find their trained personnel poached by employers who do not train their staff? Does he agree that that is a serious consideration for any industry investing in any area?

Mr. Leighton: That is absolutely true. All successful employers, businesses and companies train staff. We must ensure that their efforts are not undercut by bad employers who do not train, but poach. That is the argument for a levy. We should not apologise for speaking about a levy. It is exactly what we want. It is difficult to have confidence in an approach which leaves everything to employers.

My main criticism of the Government is that, when a radical improvement in national training and education is needed urgently and badly, they abdicate all responsibility. If anyone asks about training, he is always referred back to the TECs. It has nothing to do with the Government. Ministers repeat endlessly that training is a matter for employers and nothing to do with the Government. They wash their hands of it. That is the Government's major sin of omission. It is a view driven by dogma. They have an ideological aversion to intervention. That is the nub of the issue and where things have gone wrong. It is incredible that the Government should be so shortsighted. The market mechanism—the invisible hand of Adam Smith—will not produce enough training. In the present recession manufacturing companies are struggling to survive. They are cutting anything that can be cut and often training is one of the first casualties.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that in the past training has been one of the areas to be cut. Is he aware that in these present difficult times that is not happening? The CBI is saying that for the first time industry is recognising the importance of maintaining its training budgets and that they are not being cut.

Mr. Leighton: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the best employers now understand the importance of training. Nevertheless, this is not an economic climate which encourages training, as the hon. Gentleman will agree from his knowledge of these matters.

Employers' interests are often the short-term, specific training needs of their particular company. It should be fairly simple for everyone to grasp that the aggregate of the present needs of individual companies does not equal the national need or national interest. Somebody must look not just at the perception of present needs, but at the country's future needs. Who can speak up for the nation's needs in the overall national interest? Only the Government, not individual employers. That is what divides us in the House.

We in the Labour party think that the Government should accept that responsibility. Obviously, there must be local efforts, but they must add up to a national strategy. The seriousness of our situation means that it cannot be left to a purely voluntary approach and to market forces. Statutory underpinning is needed. The Government should set clear, national targets and monitor progress regularly.

The previous Secretary of State, who I am pleased to see always attends our debates on these matters, advocated setting national targets. He was on the right lines. The new Secretary of State has reneged on all that. He has made a dramatic U-turn and gone backwards.

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Leighton: Perhaps the Secretary of State will change his mind and say that he accepts the targets laid down by his predecessor.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman will know that I have said that targets must be clearly related to responsibilities. I set out the responsibilities of those who have a role to play in these matters in my national strategic guidance which I issued in the autumn. I have welcomed the CBI's initiative. It is consulting about national targets. I have said that when the CBI's initiative is complete, I shall consider with it how best the Government can be associated with the targets that come from that exercise, so long as they are closely related to the relevant responsibility.

Mr. Leighton: Perhaps the present incumbent has not completely fallen back on the previous position. Perhaps

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he is on a learning curve and is coming round to the idea of accepting the responsibility of setting national goals. Last night, I had the chance of speaking to Sir Bryan Nicholson of the CBI who has done a great deal of work on this issue. He has the right idea and the previous Secretary of State had the right idea. I hope that the present Secretary of State will come round to it. I should be grateful if he would write to me and set out exactly what his policy is on these matters.

All 16 to 18-year-olds should get education and training leading to a recognised qualification. I was pleased to hear what the Secretary of State said about that today. It should be unlawful to employ youngsters without training.

In order to provide a real choice for youngsters of whether to stay on or to leave school at 16, an allowance should be paid to those who stay on. A youngster who leaves school and goes on a youth training scheme receives an allowance. In other words, we pay people to leave school. We should pay them a similar amount to stay at school from the age of 16. That point must be addressed.

It is not only the young; all workers need training. Every year time should be allocated for training. All our people at every level, now and throughout their working life, need training to cope with the changing world. I am attracted to the idea of everyone having a training passport. It would outline their entitlements to training —their rights. It would also outline the details of their achievements. We need to make a special effort to reach out to women, especially those who return to work, and ethnic minorities. There should be training committees in every work place just as there are safety committees. We should ensure that good firms are not undercut by bad ones—that those who train are not undercut by those who poach.

How are we to pay for this? In my experience, everything comes back in the end to money and who pays. The hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) said that the British Government put as much money into training as continental Governments and that historically British employers have not invested an equal sum. We could gain by looking at the French practice. The French have a levy on pay bills to be spent on training. I think that it is 1·4 per cent., but we can discuss how much it should be. The great merit of that is that there is no bureaucracy. When a firm's accounts are audited, if the money has been spent on training, that is fine and if not, it is taken in tax. The levy should be linked to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, which Sir Bryan Nicholson is promoting. In that way training will be seen not as a cost, but as an essential investment leading to increased productivity and competitiveness. It would be a way of getting more out of the work force by having less machine downtime, the ability to use more advanced technology, to innovate and respond to change. A systematic investment in our greatest renewable resource—our people—will yield increasing results and returns over time. For the individual, training is the gateway to opportunity, to rewards, to success and to job satisfaction.

My criticism of the Government is their failure to respond to the challenge and to accept their responsibility. They have refused to set targets, but, given what the Secretary of State has just said, I look forward to targets being set. The Government have refused the money that is available, which is the wrong signal to send now. They persist in relying upon voluntaryism, and in that way they have failed the nation.

5.19 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) in his concern for training for the long-term unemployed. I am also touched by his concern for employment training and the employment training programme. However, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) that that concern would be a darned sight more convincing if it had not arisen after a period in which many in the Labour party had campaigned against employment training and proper training for the long-term unemployed.

The previous shadow spokesman on training went round the country seeking to campaign against employment training. The Trades Union Congress did the same, and went against it at its conference. Its decision was not only against my advice, but against the advice of the Leader of the Opposition. I am sure that the hon. Member for Sedgefield remembers that his right hon. Friend pleaded with the TUC to reconsider its decision. The Labour party is not in such a strong position now as the hon. Member for Sedgefield suggested it was to take a moral stand on training.

Mr. Blair: Surely the criticism of employment training was based not on the notion of training for the unemployed, but on the insufficiency of training within the scheme. If that is so, surely the important thing is to use any extra resources to improve the quality of training.

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is trying to re-write history. I understand his embarrassment, but it is all down on the record. Despite the hon. Gentleman's considerable techniques as a lawyer, I do not believe that even he can square the fact that the leader of his party went to the TUC to ask it to vote one way, but it voted the other way. If that is a victory for the Labour party, may it have many similar victories in other areas.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I advise the right hon. Gentleman not to pursue that argument too far, because he should know that his successor is backing away at speed from employment training because he has realised what a waste of money it has been in terms of outcome.

Sir Norman Fowler: That is not right; it is yet another fundamental misconception of employment training. I accept that employment training is not sacrosanct, but there is no proposal to abolish it.

There is more agreement on both sides of the House about training than this debate has so far illustrated, which is a pity—the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) touched upon that. Some schemes and programmes have been remarkably successful, for example, the compacts. Under that scheme, industry and schools have come together so that children who meet particular requirements have a job with training. That scheme was long overdue. The first compact initiative was a scheme undertaken in Newham, but the major initiative was carried out by the Government after I had visited Boston.

I would have been happy if we had had four or five compacts as a result of our initiative, but we now have 47 and another 16 are on stream. About 5,0000 employers take part in those compacts, and 25,000 jobs with training are available. That is an outstanding result. For years we have all spoken about the importance of industry and education working closer together. The compacts have achieved just that, for the benefit of young people.

There are two ways in which we can approach this debate. First, we can treat it as a party knockabout, in which the Opposition seek to establish that all the problems in training have suddenly arisen in the past 10 years. That is a silly argument and anyone who knows anything about training knows that it is nonsense. If we pursue such an argument, it will not add a great deal to our debate. Alternatively, we can recognise that training and the lack of training are a long-term problem.

In terms of training, this country has a great deal about which to be modest. We have run behind countries such as Germany not just for 10 or 20 years, but for the entire century. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East, with his knowledge of the subject, made that precise point. In terms of training we have run behind our major competitors in western Europe for the past 90 years. If we accept that, however, we should try to put together the best ideas available so that we can make a recovery. That recovery has started in the 1990s, and it must go on into the next century. However, we shall not be able to change the whole basis of training in a matter of a few months or years—such change must continue decade after decade.

Given the problems faced by British industry, this may seem an odd time to raise the subject of training, but training is a long-term policy that must be followed. In one respect, we are better placed now to tackle the problem of training than at any time in the past 40 years. In the past, many of our managers had to deal exclusively with strikes and other industrial relations problems. However, in part due to reform of the industrial relations law, such disputes are not anything like as much a problem now as they were in the 1960s. Industrial relations are much better than they were, and I am sure hon. Members will welcome that improvement. The question for the Government and the nation is, what is the next step?

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I agree with my right hon. Friend that now is a good moment to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on training on the part of employers. Does my right hon. Friend also agree that there is a necessary requirement to raise the quality of goods and services, and that to link quality with training is a necessary step forward?

Sir Norman Fowler: Yes, the challenge now facing the country is to make its work force as skilled as possible.

A range of actions are required to improve the skills of our work force. We should be open to the challenge, and we should consider all the options. I am sure that all hon. Members recognise that we must ensure that those in the 16 to 19-year-old age group are trained well. We know about the shortage of young people coming on to the labour market, and we must ensure that that age group is treated for what it is—a scarce resource. Too many young people go into jobs without training and the time has come to consider radical steps to ensure that that no longer happens.

We should not, however, run away from the consequences, and if that means some kind of mandatory training, so be it. I strongly advocate that that issue be considered anew. The public would support some change if the reward was better training for young people and that people in the 16-to-19 age group did not enter the labour market without any training or prospect of training.

We must also remember that people who are beyond school age and youth training, even though it goes up to the age of 19, are at work now. It is important to realise that training does not simply take place at an initial, introductory stage, but must continue through life. We must be signed up to that concept.

We have a duty to unemployed people: there is no question about that. We have a particular duty to the long-term unemployed. When I examined some employment training programmes, it struck me that there was a great deal of talent among long-term unemployed people if only we could use it properly. There is a massive agenda for training.

There is a mountain to climb in training. No matter which party is in power, that mountain exists, because the problem is so long-standing in Britain. I make three suggestions for the future. First, there must be some consistency in training policy. Clearly, schemes can be changed and developed. Changes in employment training are not a source of criticism, but the basic structure should remain. It is important to have national standards, but it is also vital to have local delivery. In that I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The training and enterprise councils are of fundamental importance because they involve local industry, local commitment and some excellent managers.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield referred to the comment in *The Economist*. I believe that *The Economist* has got it entirely wrong on training and enterprise councils. It published an article on their history which I knew from my knowledge and experience was entirely misplaced and wrong. The chairman of the National Training Task Force replied to the article and *The Economist* has returned to the fray. It does no good. It simply betrays the fact that it is not aware of the developments taking place in training in Britain.

Having created training and enterprise councils and attracted some outstanding managers to them, we must devolve to the TECs. There must be no question of lingering bureaucracy or, dare I say it, the Department of Employment, or a part of it, remotely getting in the way or drowning the councils in forms and regulations. The TECs must have the freedom to deliver.

My second suggestion is that it must be recognised that Government have a financial duty and responsibility to train unemployed people. I hear what is said about employment training. I agree that one of the major problems—the hon. Member for Newham, North-East will accept this—is to persuade people to consider the training schemes and opportunities on offer. Often it is not a case of people going on employment training programmes or to job clubs and saying, "We do not like this. It is inadequate." People simply do not go, even if they have agreed to do so. If anything could be done to alleviate that problem, everyone would be happy.

The London survey, and to a lesser extent the west midlands survey, showed that a great number of long-term unemployed people had qualifications. Many had a

[Sir Norman Fowler]

degree. It was not a lack of training that was at fault but a lack of will—perhaps motivation is a better word—to return to employment.

When unemployment falls, as it did in the past two or three years, the cash for training unemployed people is reduced. I agreed to reduce it. If one means what one says about giving priority to other areas such as the health service, Ministers should be prepared to reduce their budgets. However, I must say in the gentlest way that that is not the position today. Unemployment is not falling, it is increasing, and better training is one way of tackling it. I address those words not to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment but rather to the shadowy unseen guest at all our debates, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

We have a substantial training budget in Britain of £2·6 billion. By any standards, that is a substantial amount. It is certainly much more substantial than the amount spent by the previous Labour Government, but I hope that we can take a new look at the matter.

My third point is also about money and resources. There are two possible sources of money for training. One is the Government and the other is industry. When I say "the Government", I really mean the taxpayer. Training for industry is the responsibility of industry. But we then come up against the old problem that the best companies train and the others tend to poach the people who have been trained. That argument has bedevilled the training debate year after year in the House.

I say to the hon. Member for Sedgefield that I am cautious about a national levy collected by a national body and policed—inevitably, such schemes must be policed —by a national bureaucracy, which was how it worked on the last occasion that such a scheme was tried. However, I say openly that I am not opposed in principle to those who avoid providing training making some financial contribution.

The obvious solution—here I take up a point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—is to ask the training and enterprise councils and the National Training Task Force for their advice and proposals. It is they who represent industry. They know the training position. They know the impact of training on industry and the financial impact on industry itself. They include some outstanding people. It would be in accordance with our views on the training and enterprise councils to ask them to examine the position and make proposals on a basis of all options being open.

The training and enterprise councils are much more likely than we are to know what is best for industry. We should recognise that training has changed in Britain and that we have passed the stage where the centre seeks to know best on all subjects, whether that centre is the Department of Employment, Sheffield, the Manpower Services Commission or the Training Agency. We now have a potentially much more flexible and practically experienced organisation. My only plea is that we should use it to its maximum effect and impact. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to do so.

Few subjects in government are more important than training. If we can get it right, we can have a skilled work force and a prosperous country. If we fail, our future is unquestionably much more limited. There is a long way to go, but the Government are getting it right, and they certainly deserve our support tonight.

5.39 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro) : In some ways the speech by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was the most thoughtful in the debate so far. That was partly due to his privilege as one who has moved beyond the job rather than being in it or aspiring to it. A number of his comments were well worth discussing and I hope that the Minister will deal with one of them in particular—the right hon. Gentleman's emphasis on the fact that there is still a mountain to climb.

The Secretary of State often says that the Labour Opposition would do better if they gave credit where it was due. I am happy to give such credit. The Government's achievement is that of having introduced the principle of entitlement where previously there was virtually none. It is a definite step forward and now we need to discuss quality, methods of delivery and the necessary investment to back up that entitlement.

Much of what the Secretary of State discussed, however, concerned travelling through the foothills—ascending a peak, dropping down the other side and ascending another one, whereupon the Government raise a flag and congratulate themselves on having climbed another foothill. But the mountain remains to be climbed. In some cases we need to build on what is already in place; in others, we must make new departures.

My speech will differ from the Labour party's contribution to this debate in three essential respects. First, I intend to concentrate on an outline of our policy proposals instead of discussing what is happening or what has happened, which does not get us very far. Secondly, my party has clearly identified education and training as priorities and we have also clearly stated that increased investment, for which we call, may imply an increase in taxation. If people do not believe that to be a correct priority they will reject it, but they face a clear choice on our stance.

Thirdly, I make no apology for concentrating much of what I have to say on subjects that are the responsibility not of Employment Ministers but of Ministers at the Department of Education and Science. Our policy would be to bring training and education together in one Ministry—a necessary change.

Much of what needs to be done to lay the skills base for this country should be directed at the 16 to 19-year-olds and their involvement in continuing education and training. Much of the context of this debate was outlined at rather too great length by the Opposition spokesman, who did not leave himself time to spell out Labour's alternative—it would have been useful to know its alternative.

In June last year the estimates day debate on training fell in the same week as the publication of the Employment Select Committee report on the subject. The report highlighted the poor record of this country in training people in the skills needed for the new high technology age which we are entering. Eight months later there has been no adequate response to the points made in the report. The Government are not sufficiently heeding the warnings about what will happen—if they do not act more quickly —to our competitive position and to the future of young

people who will continue to be turned out without the skills that they need. We may talk about adult training, but if 16 to 19-year-olds miss out at that age it is difficult for them to retrieve later what they missed. That is why we must move as rapidly as possible to improve what they are being given so that we can stop turning out so many youngsters without skills and start to turn them out with skills.

The Government have implemented cuts in training. I understand the argument that unemployment has fallen, but my party believes that that opportunity should have been taken to begin a massive improvement, not to economise. Ministers talk of the importance of training; they deliver a cut of 30 per cent. for training programmes for the adult unemployed. They talk of the importance of skills; they deliver reduced expenditure on employment training. They talk of the importance of training for the young, but they cut expenditure on youth training in real terms.

So what hope, what prospect and what promise of opportunity does this give the unemployed and the young? The problem is becoming increasingly urgent. As unemployment rises, demand for education and training will become more apparent. I crave the indulgence of the House for an example from my constituency. In September last year, the largest single employer in St. Austell, English China Clays, announced 750 redundancies—a devastating blow for what is in some ways a one-industry town. Most males there are employed in that industry, which is relatively unskilled but which provides stable employment opportunities for young people growing up in the area.

Not so long ago English China Clays' executives were rather unhappy about programmes of investment in alternative employment in the area because they believed that they could use all the male labour that was likely to come on the market and they did not fancy the idea of having to compete for employees.

We now recognise that such employment is in long-term decline. The headquarters staff of the company are moving out of St. Austell in response to the company's international concerns. Some of the workers face compulsory redundancy, but the greatest impact is on the employment prospects for 16 to 19-year-olds, who used to expect and receive training and employment from the town's major employer.

That highlights the inadequacy of investment in the skills that would enable these young people to build alternative careers or would attract employers who might want to make St. Austell a centre for alternative skills. Far as we are from the mainstream, apart from the extractive industries—tin, clay, fish or food, the traditional industries of Cornwall—there are not many other reasons for employers to set up in the area if the work force lacks the necessary skills.

In Cornwall, wages are 20 per cent. lower than the national average and unemployment is double the national average. Whatever happens to wages or unemployment elsewhere in the country, statistics for Cornwall are always roughly the same: wages 20 per cent. below and unemployment roughly double. The only way to overcome the problem is to build a skills base that can begin to transform the economy of my part of the world. Rather in the same way as Cornwall is on the edge of the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom is on the edge of Europe, and in the long term the United Kingdom itself may become an economy with low wages, high unemployment and few skills—just as the economy of Cornwall has traditionally been.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that employers all over the country are taking much more interest in schools and are running some of the courses in those schools to help groom youngsters for the industries in which they are interested? Training and enterprise councils, made up of the top management of top local companies, are an enormous success. Gone are the old moans from industry that schools do not produce the type of people that it wants. Now, local industries train the people whom they need for the skills to match their industries. At the same time, I realise that the hon. Gentleman's constituency is a peculiar case.

Mr. Taylor: I do not deny the importance of the involvement of business in schools. I encourage it; I should like more of it. Neither do I dismiss the work in which TECs are engaged or some of the experiments, such as credit systems, that are being conducted, or the work of companies such as Sight and Sound Education Ltd that are delivering skills, not just training. That is interesting and points to new initiatives that would bring a high return on investment. That has not always been the case; nor is it the case now.

As I say, the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) is talking about the foothills, not the mountain. We are not overcoming the problem as a whole. TECs are essentially a system of management and delivery and do not deal with how much is delivered or with the quality levels that are needed. The Government have to initiate that, because they set the financial limits and decide on the quality levels. The Government must tackle that much more strongly.

I shall now deal with training for 16 to 19-year-olds. The debate about the crisis in training should not get bogged down in the immediate technical problems of how it is delivered, although such problems urgently need to be tackled. We will solve this once and for all only by looking into the slightly longer term to see what needs to be achieved. The long-term skills shortage is a tragedy. If we do not deliver the goods now, we will face difficulties in future and will not be able to retrieve the position.

I am angry at the way in which we have failed the majority of our 16 to 19-year-olds. We should be ashamed of the way in which their potential is marginalised by a system that focuses on the academic minority. In Britain only 35 per cent. of 16 to 19-year-olds are in full-time education or training. In Germany the figure is 47 per cent., in France it is 66 per cent., in Japan 77 per cent. and in the USA it is 79 per cent. One third of our 16 to 19-year-olds are not receiving even part-time education or training, and no solution to the skills shortage will be found unless the needs of that age group are met. We need to create a climate in which it is natural for young people automatically to continue education and training of some sort until the age of 19. In the world that we are entering we cannot safely say that we have completed anybody's education and training at the age of 16. To say that is to sell people and the country short, because it will not be long before we find skills shortages emerging. Young people must be given a sound skills base.

[Mr. Taylor]

Too many young people are cut off from future education opportunities, and that means that the needs of our economy are not met. At 16, many young people are disillusioned with education and seek independence and the attraction of earning money. We need to find a way to reconcile that with the need to continue their education and training. It is scandalous that so many employers are keen to capitalise on the desire to earn and have independence and buy young people out of training into low-status jobs for life. Such jobs have limited career potential and no opportunity for training. We know that employers offer youth trainees a few pounds extra to leave courses which would give them the qualifications that they will later need to improve themselves and which the country will also need. We must tackle that problem.

The Liberal Democrats have proposed a radical measure to address the natural aspirations of young people while providing them with education and training. We do not flinch from arguing that all employees under the age of 19 should spend two days a week in education and training, part of it at the direction of the employer and part depending on the choice of the individual. The benefits of those two days are undisputed. Whether the principle of compulsion is disputed is another matter, but the benefits will be better skills, improved education and career prospects, and the better trained work force that the economy needs.

Two days is the base from which young people could be sufficiently qualified to go back into higher education at a later stage. That is crucial. Those two days would be spent following recognised and validated courses with a range of standards. The best of the young people would be able to meet standards that would enable them to return to publicly funded higher and further education. All policies currently aimed at those who leave school at 16 fail to do that. We would offer to those young people the choice of either staying full time at school or taking up employment offering two days a week qualified education and training, from which the best of them on either route could see a way into further or higher education. That would begin to bring about a dramatic change in the way that we treat our young people, especially those who could not otherwise afford to take such opportunities.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): There is a more feasible, cost-effective and better organised way to deal with this issue. The Government and the Opposition are committed to the Business and Technician Education Council, which is wedded to the system of preparing people for work and for education opportunities in school and on entering employment. Some schools are involved in projects with the Department of Education and Science, specifically to provide that type of curriculum for 16 to 19-year-olds who are in education and working for local authorities. They work to a curriculum agreed with the Department of Education and Science and BTEC and have recognised standards to reach. That is a far more logical way to deal with the matter than the way proposed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Taylor: BTEC has many advantages and much can be built on it, but I do not think that it addresses the problem that I seek to address. I do not propose to give way again because I wish to outline a package and I am concerned about the time.

Through the element of compulsion we can break the present cycle, which leads to many people rejecting education and training at 16, often because their parents did that or because their expectations are low. Some parents are not prepared to allow their children to continue with their education and training because they cannot afford to see it through. We would provide a valuable freedom by saying to young people that they can have the independence of a salary and the responsibilities of employment, but that the option of further education and training is still available, as it will be if young people obtain an accredited qualification as a result of their two days out-of-work training.

That is not a proposal for sending 16-year-olds back to school. It is to give them an opportunity to receive training or education in any subject they like, academic or practical, relevant to their job, for their own development, or for its own value. We need such an initiative to reverse attitudes in Britain, and there is no point in pretending that anything less will deliver the kind of change that we need within the time that is available.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: If time allows I shall give way later, but I should like to make some progress.

In order to achieve what is needed we must question the Government's insistence on maintaining the academic and technical divide and the A-level system. We must have a fully modular single system of academic and tertiary qualifications, overseen by a national body. Employers and other groups must be able to set up courses that are validated and approved by that body, and are tailored to the needs of a company, group or sector. That would provide a system of education for 16 to 19-year-olds that would meet the needs of every individual and ensure that no horizons are unnecessarily limited by the nature of the system itself.

The problem as a whole cannot simply be tackled by considering only 16 to 19-year-olds, because we have already allowed too many people in that age group to slip through and reach adulthood without the skills which they now need on the shop floor and which they will need even more in future. That means giving equal importance to adult education. First, we must develop and give to people the right to return to training or education. The period of training would be equivalent to one year but would probably be taken in modules. There must be investment in such a system, and we must ensure that business is prepared to recognise its value.

Secondly, if we are to do that at an achievable cost, we must use new techniques and new methods. I mentioned some of the developments earlier. We must look at the open learning and distance learning techniques, developed by the Open university at graduate level, but applicable at all levels. Although the Government have started to move on this, they have not yet done anything effective, particularly at the Open college. The matter must be re-addressed.

If we have both a new start for 16 to 19-year-olds—the group which misses out under the British education and training system—and help for adults who cannot make up

for what was not delivered to them at an earlier stage, we shall begin to develop a system that will put us at the forefront of what is happening in Europe and the world rather than at the back. Rather than criticising, the Labour party should have been offering that as an agenda. We are prepared to face up to the costs of such a system, but it is not. The Government may argue that they have already made many achievements, but that is to concentrate only on the foothills and to forget the mountain that there is still to climb.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The minimum time taken by Back-Bench Members has been 20 minutes each. This is a short debate and the winding-up speeches are to start at a little before 6.30. I appeal for brevity.

6 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I agree with the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). Apart from covering almost everything to do with training, he expressed a moderate and non-partisan view of the aims for training with which many of us agree. The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) also put forward aims with which we can agree.

The Opposition motion is a little audacious. If ever there was a party which did not recognise the importance of training to the country, it was the Labour party. I agree that in the past even the Tory party gave less importance to training than it does now, and that industry was reluctant to see the importance of training. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), said that the needs of the country and those of employers often did not coincide, but they must come somewhere near to coinciding if they are to succeed. If they do not, the danger will be that the centre will have to set out what everyone should do. That has been tried in the past and it did not work. The system provided opportunities for education and training. If that suited the individual, that was fine; but if it did not, nothing else was available. What was on offer was restricted.

There was a similar problem with the training boards. Instead of the employer and the trainee getting what they wanted and the system being fitted around that, the boards and the Department laid down rules. Through the training and enterprise councils, the Government are trying to provide a system which takes account of what the individual and the company need. In particular, the youth training scheme will be geared to the needs of the individual. That is what training is all about.

The hon. Member for Truro spoke about providing for the 16 to 19-year-olds. I accept that this is an important group. Of particular importance are those in it who do not go on to further education and who, in general, need some training. I wonder how many of those who leave school at 16 from choice would look forward to the opportunity that the hon. Member for Truro would like to provide for them. YTS has brought about a recognition by 16 to 19-year-olds that training is desirable. Before YTS, many who left school at 16 did not accept that training should be a part of their future. They did not realise that it was necessary and they resented doing it. Even today, many young people would prefer to leave school at 16 without having to go into training. That may be a fault of the education system. Unless the development and acceptance of training which have been a part of YTS are carried on, things will never improve.

Mr. McCartney: In the 1960s, when I left school, everyone in my class who left at 15 started an apprenticeship the following Monday. That was traditional, but since then the apprenticeship system has been destroyed, along with the opportunity to learn skills. When I left school, anyone who wanted an apprenticeship was guaranteed one. Nowadays, those leaving school are offered short-term YTS places.

Mr. Stevens: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. In the 1960s, people could go into fully paid jobs rather than apprenticeships. Whether they believed in that or not, the trade unions encouraged the development of such jobs. Often, because of the way the wages were set, one would not necessarily get better wages for having completed an apprenticeship than for having a national certificate. The lack of differentials between skilled and semi-skilled work was a great deterrent to training. It also did not encourage companies.

I welcome the approach that the Government have taken and their success in the way the TECs have developed. For the first time, industry, local education authorities and the community have come together to generate the training to serve an area and the people in it. So often, facilities were available for training but did not provide the skills necessary for the area. As a result, industry did not have the skills that it wanted at the right time. Time is essential in training. One cannot guess what might happen in five years' time, particularly if the projection is a national one. For example, population forecasts of what might happen in five years are often not fulfilled for 10 years. If that happened with training, we would have an awful lot of trouble on our hands. TECs are important because they understand their areas and offer a facility that we have not previously had.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East was critical of the TECs in comparison with the other schemes of the past 10 years. However, the acceptance by 16 to 19-year-olds of training because of YTS and the changes that we have made in the training available to them has brought us to the position where, instead of having a general national concept, we can focus on local areas, relying on businesses and local education authorities to provide training. If we had said 10 years ago that we could get industry and commerce enthusiastic about combining with schools, LEAs, technical colleges, polytechnics and universities to work on a training scheme in their local area, we would have been told that it could not happen. The evolution of the Government's training scheme has brought us to that position. There is a mountain to climb, but we are over the foothills to which the hon. Member for Truro referred, and we can start the ascent, confident that the guides that we have put in place in the TECs are among the best possible.

It is generally accepted that in the months ahead more people will, unfortunately, be made redundant, and one group may be less well provided for in the new TEC structure—those for whom the community programme was devised. I appreciate that the community programme did not, in general, provide good training, but it served some purpose for some people. As well as assisting with some of the jobs that needed to be done in the local

[Mr. Stevens]

community, it provided a base for people who were not ready for a more sophisticated training set-up and who, under the TEC system, may not be regarded as suitable for training to a particular level of skill by commercial and industrial bodies. Will my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State consider whether some community programme type work should be retained?

Organisations such as Apex trust have set up some good schemes for the rehabilitation of offenders, particularly those between 16 and 19 years of age who often find it difficult to return to the employment or training in which they were engaged before their conviction. I appreciate that such organisations are not eliminated, but they do not automatically fit easily into the TEC structure. There may be one or two other similar groups which I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to consider when he meets the chairmen and chief executives of the TECs.

We are going in the right direction, however, and there is more confidence in the provision of training in Coventry and Warwickshire than I have seen for a long time.

6.12 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Training has become like sunshine—everybody is in favour of it—but the Government do not want to pay for it.

Last Thursday, I went to the launch of the City and Inner London North Training and Enterprise Council—CILNTEC—my local TEC covering the City, Hackney and Islington, which took place in the Mansion house. I was struck by the grandeur of the surroundings, which were very impressive to a girl from Hackney. I was impressed by the energy, enthusiam and ability of the people who have been found to serve on the TEC—notably the chairman, David Peake from Kleinwort Benson, and our two Hackney representatives, Christopher Latham and Julian Royle. Above all, in the glittering surroundings of the Mansion house, I was struck by the fact that the future life chances of the thousands of young people in Hackney whom I represent depend on the initiative succeeding. That is why I want to talk positively about what I want to see from the TEC initiative.

Nevertheless, it would be unrealistic not to put the TEC initiative in the context of the failure of publicly funded training in the past decade. Conservative Members from outside London who talk in glowing terms of YTS can never have talked to inner-city youngsters about their experiences of it. They saw themselves being used as cheap labour, they came off the schemes to no jobs, and they felt that they were being exploited. Past attempts at publicly funded training have a deservedly bad reputation among some of the young people whom such training was designed to help.

Looking at the Government's training record in the past 10 years, it is difficult to escape the impression that their training schemes were far more concerned with massaging down unemployment figures than with genuinely providing some sort of hope, future and marketable skills for the kind of young people whom I represent. There can be no doubt that the TECS are an attempt by the Government to try to nudge and push training into the private sector, and to make the private sector tackle endemic unemployment and training issues which are not really the business of the private sector.

CILNTEC has been launched in adverse circumstances. First, there is the recession which, until a few months ago, Ministers refused to talk about. It was the recession that dared not speak its name. But we in Hackney know that there is a recession. The head of the local school careers service says that jobs for her school leavers have dried up. Small companies, estate agents, small manufacturers and builders' merchants in Hackney know that there is a recession. Inevitably, recession means that businesses have less money to spend on training and many firms will go out of business altogether. The TECs could not have more adverse circumstances in which to try to get off the ground, and to add insult to injury their expected budgets have been cut by up to a third.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Is it not scandalous that a 50 per cent. cut in training places on Merseyside was announced last week? Inadequate though the scheme is, that cut will make a huge difference to the training prospects of young people on Merseyside—exactly the kind of people my hon. Friend is talking about.

Ms. Abbott: I agree entirely. Such cuts are an act of bad faith with the many genuine and committed business people and members of the community who are giving up their time to serve on TECs. Many life-long Conservatives serving on TECs are shocked and affronted that the Government could welch on them in that way.

It is unreasonable and cynical of the Government to expect the private sector—which, certainly in the south, is experiencing a worse recession and slump than in the early 1980s—to take up the slack in training provision which will result from the Government's cuts. It is no use talking about lowering the number of unemployed when the Government have massaged unemployment figures year in and year out. Ministers will have seen a survey carried out by the London School of Economics in December 1990 which shows that even now TECs are struggling to cope with their responsibilities due to the lack of support and funding problems.

I represent one of the poorest constituencies in the country, with precisely the kind of people who need training, who want training and who have a positive contribution to make to the economy if they can only have that training, and I want to see certain things from the TECs as they develop.

All TEC chairmen want to see a commitment from the Government to fund the TECs properly. They all want proper support from the Government. In the move to employer-based training—employer-led, semi-privatised training—the weakest and most vulnerable of our young people should not go to the wall.

It would not be proper to leave the subject without touching on black trainees in the inner cities. As Ministers will be aware, one in five of trainees on schemes in London are black, but they are twice as likely to be unemployed. The unemployment level overall for trainees leaving schemes is 16·3 per cent., but the level for Afro-Caribbean trainees leaving schemes is 28·6 per cent. Black trainees with the same qualifications, and as much energy, commitment and will to succeed, have found great difficulty with the current schemes. There has been a

marked reluctance by private sector employers to take them on. Investigations and surveys have found that there is discrimination.

It is all very well for Ministers to consider short-term accountancy and cuts, but if they are pursuing a training policy which allows the weakest to go to the wall and allows a pool of disaffected inner-city youth to fester and grow, they are storing up problems for themselves which will cost far more to solve. I do not want to see young people in the inner city squeezed out under the TEC regime because of its employer-based nature and the stringency of funds.

Conservative Members are smiling. They do not live in the inner city and they do not know what a hard and cruel life the young people have. They do not understand what it is like in Hackney, where the unemployment rate for young black males is one in two. I do not want the House to discover what that might mean in instability and social tension.

I want the TECs to work and to meet the needs of all young people. I do not want the needs of inner-city young people, particularly young black people, to be marginalised because they may be more difficult, more complex and more expensive to deal with, with the result that employers will not be interested in that social dimension.

For better or worse, millions of young people want the new employer-based training to work. It will be a terrible fraud on them and their parents if the TECs are set up almost to fail because they are so much under-resourced by the Government. In their vision of the future for training, how do Ministers seek to meet the needs of inner-city young people, and young people from ethnic minorities and other groups whose needs were largely met by the community programme?

The new TEC in Hackney combines the tremendous resources and jobs base of the City with the energy, enterprise and passion to achieve of some of my constituents. We can achieve great things in Hackney. It is easy for the Government to make short-term cuts in training to ensure that their books balance. However, regardless of political affiliation, people will believe that a Government unwilling to invest in training and in the future of young people disregards its responsibility to the country.

Even with all their limitations and problems, I should like the TECs to succeed. I can only reflect on what concerned business men have said to me about their fears because the Government have left the TECs so short of money. In inner cities, we want not just training which is cheap and convenient for the Government to provide and which brings down unemployment artificially, but real, high-quality training which offers hope to all young people, whatever their colour or creed.

6.23 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott). She suggested that Conservative Members were smiling at what she was saying. If she was referring to me, it could only have been because I was agreeing with her about the problems that she was describing. I was a member of the Select Committee on Employment which looked into the problems of employment in the London Docklands development corporation area. We were very conscious of some of the points to which the hon. Lady has just referred.

To cheer the hon. Lady up a little, I would point out to her that it was remarkable that one of the first educational compacts was set up in that area by private enterprise, which felt that it needed to do something to help disadvantaged youngsters there. I hope that the hon. Lady agrees that the position is not as gloomy as some people have suggested.

This has been a good debate, although it has not been long enough to address all the problems. In general, the debate has been carried on in a good spirit of co-operative and constructive thought. I am sorry, therefore, that the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) opened with a slashing attack on the Government, as if they had managed to achieve nothing in the last 11 years. I am sure that in private he would not dream of suggesting that, but when he gets to the Dispatch Box he feels the need to go wild.

The hon. Gentleman dismissed the idea that the Secretary of State should refer to the need for perspective. I can see no reason why we should not have a sense of perspective. Perhaps it was the absence of a sense of perspective which led the hon. Gentleman into one or two excesses to which his speech was prone. It is right to set the debate in context and in perspective.

As has been said several times, the Government have spent two and a half times more, in real terms, on training than the Labour Government spent in the last year that they were in office. So for the Labour party to cast a stone in our direction is not justifiable on the facts. If we are doing so badly, how much worse did the Labour party do in failing to recognise that Government had a role in training?

There was a complete absence from the speech of the hon. Gentleman of any reference to the remarkable efforts of the private sector. That is important. The estimate of what the private sector is putting into training this year is £20 billion. That is not an insignificant amount.

The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington, who is not now in the Chamber, said that we could not rely on the private sector during a slump. The answer is that we can, because obviously the private sector is carrying through its responsibility. The CBI survey last week showed that, by comparison with previous difficult times, the private sector is carrying on with the job that it has set itself of providing good quality training, in-house.

When the debate was announced for today, all the private sector companies and organisations which wrote to Conservative Members—perhaps they did not write to Opposition Members—including Ford, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the CBI, wanted to tell us what they were doing in training, how important they thought it was, and how committed they were to it.

In my constituency there is an organisation called the Swindon Partnership, which was set up by private companies to get to know the schools in the area, to provide them with computers and to give them a chance to send their pupils into companies to learn how industry works. There is tremendous enthusiasm for this in my part of the world, and I know that we are not unique. Much more is happening than the Labour party is ever prepared to admit. I do not know why, unless it is for the narrow partisan political advantage that it is always seeking.

[Mr. Simon Coombs]

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) said—how well we understand Labour party thinking on this—that the nub of the matter is intervention. I do not think that I have quoted him inaccurately. He is not here to defend himself, but I am sure he will when we next meet in the Select Committee. What is youth training and employment training if not a very positive form of intervention in training? The Government may and will no doubt be accused of many things, but surely they cannot be accused of not having been prepared to intervene in the training market.

The Labour party is always against everything we try to do. The Leader of the Opposition was here at the beginning of the debate and I am sure that he enjoyed the rip-roaring stuff from the hon. Member for Sedgefield. He was nodding throughout the speech—until the point when some of my hon. Friends asked about how he had referred to TVEI when he was the Opposition spokesman on education in 1983. I saw the Leader of the Opposition mouth the words, "Not true," when it was said that he had described TVEI as beneath contempt and only suitable for "hewers of wood and drawers of water".

The right hon. Gentleman said that on "Panorama", and we know that anything that the BBC broadcasts must be true. I dare say that there are even some right hon. and hon. Members who watched "Panorama" on that occasion.

It is no use Opposition Members wagging their fingers at me, because that statement is on record. Labour was against that innovation, in the same way that they always oppose anything that we try to do to help. It is time—I will be very patronising—that Labour Members adopted the approach taken by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), who will, perhaps, stop writing and pay attention to the debate. At least that hon. Gentleman gave some thought to the matter, and is not in the business of being aggressive and horrid to anyone who tries to help. That is a splendid sign from that Bench.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Opposition often fall into the trap of thinking that just by throwing resources at the problem everything will be that much better? Is it not much more important to involve the right people, companies and trainers? That approach has worked well in Oldham and Rochdale, because we have the right calibre of people. It did not cost any more money. Additional resources are not always the answer.

Mr. Coombs: I could not have put it better myself, and of course I agree with my hon. Friend.

The Labour party, having opposed employment training and youth training, now opposes any reduction in the size of the training effort—even though that might result from a reduction also in the number who can benefit.

Labour Members always take the approach that the more money they promise to spend, the more virile they are. Members of the Opposition Front Bench look virile only when they are promising to spend money. If I run the risk of resuming my seat in a few minutes' time, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) will get to his feet with a promise of more hope for the future, if only more money can be spent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) referred to climbing mountains. We always look for the best way up, and if that sometimes requires a change of direction, we should not hesitate to take it. If that means spending a little less on employment training and a little more on providing the good advice that is available from job clubs, and on preparing personalised statements that recognise people's individual needs, that should be the way forward. The answer is not simply to go on throwing money at the problem.

Labour, as always, is bereft of ideas. It is panicking because it knows that we are winning the battle to create a better training environment. Labour will remain in opposition for as long as it only opposes ideas and fails to make constructive suggestions—as other hon. Members have done in tonight's debate.

6.32 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): It appeared that the Secretary of State wanted to talk more about the speech that my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) did not make, in respect of training investment, than the speech that he did make.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also referred to remarks attributed to me on a visit to Sheffield. That contrived assault on a perceived policy difference highlights the fact that the Government are losing the argument. I put it on record that I very much support TECs. I warmed to the remarks of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who said that TECs could have a role in a statutory framework, in respect of companies that do not train. That was a constructive proposal and one with which we identify. I hope that the Secretary of State will take it on board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), who always makes informed contributions as Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, emphasised that the key training issue is economic performance in the decade ahead.

I endorse also the suggestion made by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield that Britain's skills crisis existed long before the last war, and he made a specific reference to the mid-1880s. I quote from an article by someone who I am sure is a friend of the Conservatives, Dr. Correlli Barnett:

> "Where Britain does have successful industries, such as aerospace—£2·5 billion in the black in 1989—these are hampered by shortages of scientists and technicians. Britain still displays patterns of weakness that can be traced back to about 1840."

No one disputes that the training skills crisis has long endured. No one would argue either against the proposition that it is a complex problem, for which there is no quick fix or instant panacea. Nor would anyone disagree that the problems are deep seated, cultural and involve attitudes. Politicians can attempt to effect changes, but it often takes decades for them to have any bearing on the problems that such changes are meant to overcome.

Over the past 12 years, the Government have failed to display the urgency, sensitivity and immediacy required to resolve a deep-seated skills problem that is also structural. Given 1992, European monetary union beyond that, the threat from the Pacific rim countries, and intensification of supply-side policies in France, Germany, Italy and Japan, we must act quickly. There is no room for complacency, yet the Government often exude complacency in respect of skills training.

Skills should be used to unlock the potential that individuals have to make a contribution to our economic well-being. We talk a great deal about productivity, profitability and performance, but the key difference between Britain and its major competitor countries is that they have invested in skills training for much longer, so their cultures have adjusted and they can now enjoy the fruits of that investment in the form of measured economic success.

The Government had an opportunity in the 1980s to take the supply-side initiative. There was a massive shake-out of labour in the early 1980s and productivity improved, but there was no skills initiative. In the mid-1980s, to coincide with the electoral cycle, there was an economy boom, but still no initiative was taken on skills investment. There is now a possibility that Britain's entry into the exchange rate mechanism could create difficulties, unless we invest in the tools that will bring success.

There is a crisis of confidence in the industrial community in respect of the Government's ability to resolve the skills crisis. The Government will not speak of the devastating cuts that there have been, but in 1991-92 there will be cuts of about £367 million in employment training alone. Why do the Government show such contempt for training providers? The newspapers are littered with stories about providers going under and being treated in a cavalier fashion—receiving just a phone call or a letter from the Training Agency saying that their figures and budgets have been cut. There is no negotiation or discussion—just contempt.

One of the problems with TECs is that, although the Secretary of State is unwilling to fight in Cabinet for resources, the TECs are squeezing him for more. The net effect of all that is that TECs are now writing to the press, and confiding in us, saying, "Yes, we have a job to do, but we need the tools to do it." I believe that they are under funded and the Government must tackle that.

There is another aspect to special needs provision. Understandably, there is an emphasis on skills and the economy, but what about the excellent schemes that have been set up throughout the country to tackle the problems facing adults and young people with handicaps and disabilities? Surely it is the measure of a civilised society that, no matter how the Government view the recession, they do not walk away from people who find it enormously difficult to climb the first rung on the ladder of employment or further education. The Government should ring-fence the budget for that training.

The cash crisis is another aspect of this issue. Today we have heard much about the money that the Government have spent during the past 12 years. The Government are right. They have thrown money at the problem. The Department of Employment will have spent £46 billion between 1979 and outturn in 1992-93. But what do we see for that expenditure? Where is the training infrastructure? Where are the employment trainees' qualifications? Where are the youth trainees with qualifications? The key point about that investment is that the Government have squandered billions of pounds of taxpayers' money and have not achieved the desired effect, which is improving the economy, extending opportunities for individuals and providing the social and regional cohesion that the nation desperately needs.

When we talk about money, let us use the Government adage that it is all about "value for money". What value for money? The Government say that their policy is all about output-led investment. What are the outputs? I should like someone to tell me why we spend so much money. Indeed, considering the Gulf, the phrase comes to mind, "Why is so much money being spent on so many people, with so few results?"

The third problem that worries us is the policy chaos that the Government exude. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield made a thoughtful contribution to the debate, emphasising qualifications. He had an excellent idea and set radical and ambitious targets in November 1989. The new Minister of State, the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), said in a press release that the Fowler targets were to be abandoned. More recently there has been another slight about-turn—*[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members wish to see the press cuttings, which I cannot quote because of lack of time, I am willing to oblige them.

The Secretary of State for Employment has returned to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. He has said that by 1992, 80 per cent. of the work force should be exposed to vocational qualifications. He did not say that 80 per cent. should be achieving vocational qualifications. He could have said that 150 per cent. of the work force should be exposed to them; his statement is utterly meaningless.

The Government would be better served by returning to the radical propositions suggested by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield when he was in that high office. The right hon. Member also said that the way for the unemployed to get work was through gaining skills. However, the present Secretary of State for Employment said that training might not be the best way to get the unemployed back to work. He suggested that they should have job interviews or more counselling—anything that did not cost the Government more money.

At a time of recession, and when we are investing in TECs and on those aged between 16 and 19, we cannot allow the unemployed to be treated as second-class citizens and, as a consequence, be asked by the Government to eat cake as regards proper provision for them.

Investment is linked to training policy. When will the Government come clean with TEC chairmen, G10 and the thousands of business men throughout the country who are making a contribution, and who came into this exercise in good faith? Employers wanted to make a commitment. It was employer investment, employer-led—those are sound concepts. There is only one problem—TECs did not get the levels of cash that they expected. Now the Secretary of State and the rest of the Government are running around trading flexibilities. They are saying, "Let's give them work-related further education. Let's get them involved in TVEI." They are doing every conceivable thing except to give TECs extra cash so that they can make a contribution to our economic success.

Another problem that the Government have not tackled is the key substantive issues that the Labour party is now tackling. Why is it that after 12 years we have the most incoherent programme for 16 to 19-year-olds in Europe? We have had scheme after scheme, but there has been no coherence, no stability of policy and no stability of investment. Fewer young people now stay on at school, and fewer young people enter a proper traineeship. That trend has to be reversed. It is a substantive issue which the Government have been guilty of ignoring in the past 12 years.

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

The Government believe in voluntarism. However, in the past 140 years voluntarism has not worked in the provision of training for employees in employment. If it had worked, we, as the first industrialised nation, should be the best trading nation on earth, but we are not. We are not facing up to key issues which other countries are tackling.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay) *rose——*

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Lady has only just come into the Chamber, so I shall not give way.

Voluntarism has failed and all our modern successor countries are now considering a statutory framework for training.

Another substantive issue concerns the unemployed. We believe that they should be regarded no differently from people in work or from those aged between 16 and 19. The unemployed should have a personal skills development plan aimed at acquisition, ownership and enhancement of skills. That has to be backed up by resources and not rhetoric. That is another reason why we distance ourselves from the Government Benches.

If the Government are serious about training, we require leadership from their Front Bench and resources to replace rhetoric. We need a statutory framework that provides an opportunity for companies that train employees not to have them poached by companies that are doing nothing whatsoever. We must set standards for success, which means that we must invest more money in the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, and that we must establish a partnership in industry among employee representatives, trade unions and employers. That is the way forward.

Conservative Members mumble and laugh, but if they consider what has happened in Germany, France, Italy, Japan, parts of the United States, Denmark, the Scandinavian countries and the Pacific rim they will not laugh. Those countries have shown that taking skills seriously is the passport to economic success and to individual opportunity.

My hon. Friends may not win the vote tonight, but we shall win the election, and tackle the skills crisis.

6.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): Parliament is a place where the Government are held to account and that is quite right, but that should not lead us into the fallacy of believing that whenever we identify a problem it is all the current Government's fault—whatever party it may be —and that only the Government can do anything about it.

In the course of this debate we have had many examples of that fallacy. It was the basic premise running right through the speech by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), it was explicitly affirmed by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, and I am afraid that it was also a feature of an otherwise admirable speech by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), who I fear also fell victim to that fallacy.

I do not want to dwell on the negative features of this debate, because I agree with the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) that it has been very constructive. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) said, there has been a lot of common ground and I welcome that. The common ground is that we all want an improvement in both the quantity and the quality of training in Britain. I especially noted the eloquent remarks that the hon. Member for Truro made about his experience in St. Austell, in his constituency.

In pursuing our common objective—more and better training—we must ensure that the right strategy is adopted. A good point at which to start defining that strategy is the survey into the way in which training is funded in Britain which the Government carried out in 1986. That survey showed—the facts are not disputed—that, in 1986, the state was investing about £7 billion a year in training, while individuals were spending about £8 billion and employers some £18 billion. The last figure has since risen to about £20 billion. I have no doubt that a similar pattern can be seen in other countries. Incidentally, the study produced no evidence that we as a nation are investing less than other countries in training; in so far as it is possible to make international comparisons, they tend to show that the Government's investment is relatively high.

What is clear from the figures is that, although the Government's role is undoubtedly important, if we are to achieve the improved total national effort that we all seek, the central contribution must come from employers. I was surprised at how little appreciation the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) seemed to show when she spoke of the privatisation of training.

I intend to develop the point about the role of employers later, because it is fundamental to any solid, properly conceived training strategy. First, however, I wish to say a few words about the proper role of Government. Governments have an important role to play. As has been said, they must provide leadership and set the framework. We need to encourage the development of incentives to achieve more and better training, and we must remove or reduce the disincentives. We also need good delivery mechanisms for Government programmes —for example, the setting up of the new training and enterprise councils.

Mr. McCartney: My constituency contains an active TEC. The problem is the continuation of programmes that the TEC has taken over, and access to those programmes for the disabled. Some of the groups involved in drawing up provisions for the disabled might like an opportunity to discuss such matters with the Minister.

A second problem relates to the pilot schemes involving vouchers that TECs are to operate. How will young people be protected if the participating companies experience closures and redundancies halfway through the scheme? Will the money be chopped up so that such people can shift without any financial loss and another company can continue their training?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman has sat through the debate very patiently, and I am sorry that he was not given the opportunity to speak. I have mentioned delivery mechanisms. While it is clearly important that the TECs are given the freedom to manage the budgets allocated to them—that, I think, is common ground in the House—they will have to address the problems themselves. None

the less, I am willing to discuss the problems of people with disabilities with the hon. Gentleman, and anyone whom he may care to bring with him. The Government must, of course, take on board the hon. Gentleman's point about vouchers in regard to pilot schemes. We certainly do not want any young person to waste the opportunity provided by vouchers; nor do we want taxpayers' money to be wasted.

As I have said, we need good delivery mechanisms. Those are being provided in the form of the TECs, and it is good to see that they are being given so much support. Another point which came across to an extent in today's debate but which needs to be emphasised more strongly is the need for a strong and relevant framework of vocational qualifications. The achievements of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications are important in that connection.

The Government also have a key role to play in ensuring that young people are properly educated and trained. We have introduced such programmes as youth training, and we are launching a training credit scheme. I was interested to hear the suggestions made by the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield. We must also ensure that training is available for unemployed people who will benefit from it. I can tell the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington that we share her concern about the inner cities and ethnic minorities, and are pleased to learn that she supports her local TEC. My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton spoke of special need groups: we and the TECs take their problems very seriously, and will consider them carefully.

Let me remind the House of the scale of the Government's operations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) pointed out, they are now spending two and a half times as much, in real terms, as was spent on training 12 years ago; 900,000 people have benefited from the employment training programme since it started two and a half years ago; 88 per cent. of people who completed youth training in 1988-90 went into jobs, further training and further education, while 67 per cent. of those gained a vocational qualification. Given the large numbers who participated, that is a significant figure: some 2·7 million young people have benefited from youth training since the scheme began in 1983. I feel that that considerable achievement should be recognised.

I said that I wanted to focus on the central strategic question of how to persuade employers to increase their commitment to more and better training. I appreciated what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield, and, indeed, the hon. Member for Sedgefield, about consulting TECs and about the way forward. I assure them both that we are engaged in constant dialogue with the TECs, and are actively seeking their suggestions for ways in which to increase employers' investment in training.

Mr. Wolfson: A number of us find it worrying that, although good companies spend a good deal of money on training, many companies do not. I think that that message should be delivered.

Mr. Jackson: That is indeed important; I am about to say something about it. The same theme was touched on a number of times in today's debate, although I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Sedgefield had so little to say about what he recognises as a central question. It is a pity that he did not choose to present to the House the idea of a central training levy which he presented to the press only last week. Nevertheless, I propose to take his idea seriously, even if he has not done so.

We feel that the best way in which to achieve our common objectives—here I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson)—is to co-operate with employers to enhance their commitment, rather than coercing them. We must not forget that we have been here before. My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton reminded us that a system of legislative compulsion operated from the early 1960s until the end of the 1970s, under Governments of both parties, and I have met no one who considers that that was a success. If we have a training problem today, its roots go back to those 15 years.

We must also take into account the experience of other countries. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East said that voluntarism in training would not work, but the fact is that our major competitors—the United States, Japan and Germany—all operate voluntary systems. None has a general system of compulsory training taxes of the kind sometimes advocated by the Opposition. Only France is doing what the Opposition seem to advocate, and the general verdict of those who have viewed the French experience dispassionately is that its arrangements for legislative compulsion have not been a significant factor in its admittedly considerable training achievements.

What, then, is the Government's strategy for training? In a sentence, it is—while continuing our spending programmes—to encourage, to "incentivise" and to enable employers and individuals to undertake more and better training. That is the strategy behind the TECs. I welcome the Opposition's support for the concept, whose key features are employer leadership and local control.

It is a pity that the hon. Member for Fife, Central has been showing some equivocation, which was very wittily exposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. However, I am delighted—indeed, the whole House is delighted—that the hon. Gentleman is willing to eat his words about the training and enterprise councils. The strategy that lies behind training credits—individual young people—is the most hopeful new development. I welcome the support that we have received for this idea from the hon. Member for Newham, North-East, who is the Chairman of the Select Committee, and I hope that we shall be able to get stronger support for it from the official Opposition spokesman. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks that it is the strategy behind the very important new "investors in people" initiative. Despite the strictures of the hon. Member for Truro about the supposedly limited managerial role of TECs, they will play a key role in managing the "investors in people" initiative to ensure an improvement in training investment by companies up and down the land.

It is perhaps inevitable that in debates of this kind deficiencies and failures should be emphasised. At least so far as the Opposition are concerned, there is a premium on gloom. However, it is important to get a balanced picture. That balanced picture shows that we are making very real progress. Employers' investment in skills is rising, and is now of the order of £20 billion per year; the number of employees being trained in a given month has risen over the last five years by about 70 per cent.; the CBI's monthly surveys show a consistently rising trend of investment in

[Mr. Jackson]

training by employers; the skill levels of our work force are rising; we have statistics to show that the proportion of economically active people with qualifications is going up; the number of people with A-levels is rising; the number of people in professional and technical jobs is rising; the number of young people staying on at school is rising; the numbers of people in further and higher education are rising quite dramatically; and more and more qualified young people are entering the labour force.

The fact is that we are making very considerable progress in training. The Opposition have tried to pretend that we are not, but it is clear to all who have attended this debate that they have failed to make their case.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 227, Noes 283.

Division No. 55] **[7.1 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Martyn Jones and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter

Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Maclarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's creation of a climate and strategic framework which is encouraging employers to improve their already substantial role in the national training effort, in which participation in training and the attainment of skills is rising, and which is set fair to meet the United Kingdom's skill needs in the 1990s and beyond.

Science Policy

7.16 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the decision by Her Majesty's Government to make real cuts in the Science Budget which will terminate vital areas of research and postpone urgent new programmes; is outraged at the decision of the Secretary of State for Education and Science to suppress the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils made public in previous years; is deeply concerned at the continued crisis in the supply of science teachers and equipment in schools; and calls for a new strategy for science to restore industrial competitiveness, to raise investment in research and development to the level of the United Kingdom's foreign competitors, to raise standards in science education, and to ensure Britain's scientists are able to co-operate fully with their European partners.

It is the success of science that has made the world what it is today. It is scientific invention and inquiry above all else that has made the quality of life for many so immeasurably better than it was even 40 years ago and which, at the same time, has given politicians the power of mass destruction in war and, potentially, the means to end starvation and ill health across the globe. There is the closest correlation between the science base of nations and the resilience of their economies. Science policy has never been of greater importance.

All that should seem obvious—except, it would appear, to the Government. We have a great Department of State—the Department of Education and Science—which has the word "science" in its title. But the Government's recognition of the importance of science is a token one. In six years, there has not been a single debate in Government time on the Government conduct of science policy. The last such debate was in 1985, four Secretaries of State ago, halfway through the previous Parliament. The only debates—there have been three—in this Parliament have been called by the Labour party in its limited Supply time.

Ministers' unwillingness to debate their stewardship of science policy and the science budget arises partly from their defensiveness, and defensive they may be, given their record, as I shall show. Also, their reluctance to debate reflects something deeper—a lack of science culture in Government and a lack of proper understanding of science among the wider public. With the absence of a science culture and understanding comes a lack of confidence to engage in the many critical issues of science policy in public debate.

The charges that we make in our motion are serious, and each can be sustained by the evidence. We charge that the Government are failing properly or sufficiently to fund the science base and, as the decisions of the Science and Engineering Research Council earlier today show, that failure is a fundamental one. We charge that things are so bad that the Secretary of State has, for the first time, suppressed the advice that he has received from the independent Advisory Board for the Research Councils so as to reduce public understanding even further.

We charge that the Government have seriously neglected the supply of properly qualified science teachers in our schools and the proper equipment of our science laboratories. We charge that the Government are failing to provide an effective European dimension to British science policy, as the Select Committee made clear, and that, overall, they have no clear or coherent strategy for British science.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will produce a scattering of figures designed to prove how generous has been the Government's funding of the science base, as the Under-Secretary sought to do on the radio this morning. Neither the Government's record nor their promises stand up to serious examination. By virtually any measure, the 12 years of this Government have been 12 years in which Britain has slipped down the league of first division science nations, while others have moved up. According to the "Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development", published by the Cabinet Office:

> "British investment in research and development is failing to match that of other nations and research output, measured by the number of patents granted in the United States, is suffering accordingly."

An international survey of funding carried out by *Nature* showed Britain as the black spot for research. Britain is at the bottom of the league table for spending on research and development and the science base. As *The Daily Telegraph* pointed out on Monday, it is planned that there should be a £300 million real terms cut in the funding of research and development between now and 1993. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Britain spends less per capita than any other major competitor. The director general of the Design Council, Mr. Ivor Owen, has said that Britain is facing a national emergency in its failure to capitalise on scientific and technical expertise in the United Kingdom.

The Government's failure to invest in the science base is matched by industry's relative failure. There is a strong correlation between investment in research and development by various industries and their success in the world market. Is it any wonder, therefore, that British manufacturing industry is running its worst ever deficit in overseas trade? With the signal exception of chemical and pharmaceutical industries, which showed a 13 per cent. annual increase in investment and research and development, all other manufacturing sectors showed a decline between 1985 and 1988.

Britain's industry-funded research and development is less than 1 per cent. of GDP, compared with 1·6 per cent. in Germany and 2 per cent. in Japan. The Government do not even have a policy for insisting that companies disclose and report on their research and development in their annual reports.

The Government are responsible for the poor record of industry. That record is a product of the Government's approach to economic policy, which gives higher priority to short-term profit than long-term investment—an economic policy in which the City is the master and not the servant of wealth-producing manufacturing industries.

The science budget for 1991-92 is being increased by £32 million to £920 million. After account is taken of inflation, that means a real terms cut of £30 million from £897 million this year to £868 million next year. In paragraph 65 of its most recent report, the Conservative-dominated Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts condemned and described that as "wholly unsatisfactory".

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that, since 1979, the science budget has increased by almost a quarter in real terms, whereas under the Government of which he was a member it was stagnant in real terms?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman does well to read the brief that he has been provided with by Conservative central office, but as is often the case with those briefs, it is wrong. [HON. MEMBERS: "In what way is it wrong?"] In what way is it wrong? What is wrong is that the Government have continually underestimated the impact of inflation on the science base, and they have done so this year. This year, British science is being told that inflation is 3 per cent., whereas it is more than 10 per cent. That is why the Under-Secretary was put up by the Secretary of State this morning to patter the words that the budget is increasing, when everybody knows that it is going down, most of all those in the research councils, who are faced with the most vicious and serious cuts in the science base for more than two decades.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): If the hon. Gentleman is arguing that the science budget has not increased by 23 per cent. in the past five years, will he reflect on the fact that one of the reasons why it did not increase in real terms under the previous Labour Government was that under them, on average, inflation was 15 per cent.—twice as high as under this Government?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman has not read the Conservative central office brief. He said that the budget had increased by a quarter in five years, whereas the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) said that it had increased by a quarter in 12 years. They should at least agree the mistruths before stating them.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Is my hon. Friend aware that such is the penny-pinching the British Library has been forced to suspend its subscriptions to many scientific journals, thus depriving our science researchers of access to information that is available to researchers in other countries?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Only half of the British Library will be built, thanks to the penny-pinching of the Government. *[Laughter.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but I wonder whether they will laugh when they learn of the decisions that were made this afternoon by the Science and Engineering Research Council. I wonder whether they will laugh about the consequences of those decisions and of the cuts that this Secretary of State has made in the science base.

The consequences of those cuts are dire. Sir Mark Richmond, the new chairman of the Science and Engineering Research Council, described the science budget for next year, which Conservative Members have applauded, as "lousy". Sir David Phillips, the distinguished chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, went even further. He said:

> "The consequences of the budgets imposed on us are extremely damaging . . . Our entire range of scientific activities will have to be reduced considerably . . . In the short term, it means we are going to have to stop all short-term research grants for university scientists."

Is that a matter for laughter, I ask Conservative Members?

> "In the longer term, we will have to pull out of major projects".

Sadly for the whole of the science establishment and for all those involved in science, the long term that Sir David Phillips was worried about has come all too quickly. According to its chairman, the Medical Research Council has said that

> "research vital to human health"

will now have to be postponed. The Economic and Social Research Council has issued a list of cuts that it will have to make.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Does my hon. Friend think that that explains the disgraceful decision taken by the Government to close the Natural Environment Research Council unit at Barry dock, which has been involved in world-beating research into the environment and the depletion of the ozone layer? It will be swallowed up by bureaucrats in Southampton.

Mr. Straw: It does explain that, but the closure of research services at Barry in my hon. Friend's constituency is not the only cut being suffered by the NERC.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): It is not being cut; it is moving to Southampton, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman was not Secretary of State when the decision was made. Had he been, he would know that it involves the cut that my hon. Friend has mentioned.

Cuts are being made in the budgets and programmes of the Economic and Social Research Council, the Natural Environment Research Council and the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): The hon. Gentleman said that he does not like the figures being quoted by the Government. Does he agree with the figures that I was given this afternoon by the Library, which show that the Government's total research and development budget is a higher proportion of gross domestic product than any other developed country in the world except France?

Mr. Straw: I do not agree with the figures—*[Laughter]*—and I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. The House of Lords report on research and development shows that the Government should not take account of a good half of the amount allegedly spent on research and development, because research and development for defence should not be included. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the figures, he will see that Britain's GDP figure of 2·3 per cent. is lower than that of many of our major competitors.

Moreover, investment in this country as a proportion of GDP, even according to the very generous measures of this Government, has stagnated in the past five years, while in other countries it has increased. If there is any doubt about that, it will be dispelled by the situation in the Science and Engineering Research Council.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Would my hon. Friend be interested to know that today I asked the directors of a pharmaceutical company, British owned and proud to be so, why they had moved their research and development abroad to six countries and the answer was that our education system had failed and that we no longer produce the quantity and quality of scientists that we used to? All they want is for the Government to provide research and development money for the base, and they will see to the markets after that.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. Had Government investment in research and development been as wonderful as Tory Members who parrot central office briefs say, British science would not now face a serious crisis and we would not have to import millions of pounds more goods

[Mr. Straw]

than we export. Nor would the Conservative-dominated Select Committee on Education and Science have said at paragraph 65 of its most recent report:

"We recommend that Government funding of civil R & D be increased to match that of our major partners in the EC, France and Germany, who currently spend around 0·9 per cent. of GDP compared with less than 0·6 per cent. spent by the UK."

I can well understand why the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) is furrowing his brow. I prefer to take my evidence from that provided by the Select Committee than from his source.

Mr. Batiste: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I have been generous in giving way.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way so that I can confirm entirely what he has said. I am a member of the Select Committee on Education and Science and went on the visit to Heidelberg, Geneva and Grenoble. *[Laughter.]* Our report confirms what my hon. Friend has said. All members of the Select Committee would concede that all the British scientists whom we met in every one of those scientific establishments told us that they felt depressed and undervalued. Yet Tory Members say that the Government are supporting those scientists. I must advise my hon. Friend that when I listened to those comments about the lack of Government support I was ashamed to be British.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. If British scientists were depressed when he met them, they will be even more depressed by the SERC's decisions this afternoon.

The SERC faces greater difficulties than any other research council, partly because it accounts for more than half of the total of the science budget and partly because of the impact of the subscription to CERN, the European centre for nuclear research, on its domestic budget. This afternoon, the SERC held a meeting to discuss the present problems. It has announced measures

"to combat the shortfall in its funding for 1991-92 and the effects of this on subsequent financial years."

I assume that the Secretary of State also has a copy of this. The consequences of the shortfall are serious.

In engineering, the allocation will require

"sharp cutbacks in a number of areas, notably in: information technology, the application of computing in manufacturing engineering, engineering design, support provided by Rutherford Appleton Laboratory for engineering applications of computing in universities and polytechnics."

One could scarcely imagine more serious damage being done to major parts of engineering and information technology, in which we should lead the world, than by those decisions forced on the SERC.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I will not. I have been generous in giving way and I need to get on and make my speech in this short debate. If the Government want to provide a full day to debate their record, naturally I should be more than delighted in that debate to give way.

The SERC says that the level of funding allocated to the science board cannot sustain its existing programme. There is no question of expansion. In particular, it cannot

"afford to support two major neutron facilities . . ., in Grenoble and ISIS at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory at the present level."

Nuclear physics has already been the subject of considerable comment in the press. There are concerns about the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury, near Warrington. The SERC says:

"The Council is committed to pay the UK share of the CERN subscription and the associated UK research on particle physics. For the Nuclear Physics Board to remain within its budget, it will have to reduce very significantly its support for nuclear structure physics. To achieve this Council will have to make plans for the possible closure of the Nuclear Structure Facility at the Daresbury Laboratory."

In case Tory Members are not aware of this, the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury is one of the most renowned of such research facilities in the world. It is widely acclaimed not only by British scientists, but by all engaged in nuclear physics research in the world. If that laboratory is to close, Britain will lose its significant facility for nuclear physics research. Yet the Government willingly contemplate ending an area of research, in which we were formerly world leaders and which will shut us out of research developments in future at a stroke.

In commenting on this, the chairman of the SERC, Sir Mark Richmond, said:

"This is a leading facility for this type of research in the world which we had hoped would keep the UK in the forefront of nuclear structure science for some years ahead. I greatly regret the shadow cast over this facility, its staff and the community it supports. Council will look urgently for ways to run the facility through 1991 and 1992, so we can honour the first stage of the UK-French Agreement to develop and run the EUROGAM detector array."

The SERC stated:

"To help the Council in its further consideration of these issues, a study will be set up to assess the importance of the science in the context of the Council work as a whole."

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is telling the House that, under a Labour Government, these research councils would have no need to choose priorities. If that is so, how much would be invested and where would it come from?

Mr. Straw: I was not saying that. Obviously the hon. Gentleman has not been listening. *[Interruption.]* Of course there are difficult choices to be made in science at all times, but the last way to make them is as this Government are making them—in a wholly irrational and ham-fisted way. We would increase the science budget.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question was kindly provided yesterday by the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the chairman of the Conservative party, who—even under Conservative economic policy, which has produced a lower rate of growth over the years than ever occurred under a Labour Government—said:

"there will certainly be a growth dividend which can help ensure a substantial and sustained improvement in the quality of our schools and hospitals."

I add to that the science base.

The right hon. Gentleman was saying that the resources were available and that it was a matter of choice whether the resources from growth are used to cut taxation for the very rich or to provide essential services for our hospitals, schools and science base.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: Let me deal directly with the potential closure of the Daresbury research facility.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I shall continue.

Perhaps the Secretary of State can confirm this, but I do not believe that when Ministers made their decisions about the science base they had any idea that a potential consequence of setting the science budget at the level they did was the potential closure of the Daresbury nuclear research facility. If it was, and the Secretary of State knew that the SERC would make these decisions, he had better say so. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) asked me a question, and I am giving him the answer.

Obviously there will always be more bids than resources. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Of course that is the case. For a Government who claim to have funded science well, the least they can do, and the least that we would do, is to ensure sufficient funds year by year to match inflation. That is what this Secretary of State is not doing next year. That answers the hon. Gentleman's question.

Furthermore, we must ensure that, when difficult decisions are to be made, they are made in a rational way. It is preposterous that the Daresbury research facility is being offered up as a sacrificial lamb because the Government did not do their sums on the total cost of the CERN project. They have included the cost of CERN in the domestic science budget, and they have decided to protect the CERN subscription, but not to offer similar protection to the rest of the science budget. As a consequence, the Government appear to be saying that we must lose a world-beating research facility.

There will always be major issues to be decided at any time about big science versus little science. Those decisions should be the subject of public debate and effective review. It should not be the case that, as a result of his own carelessness and negligence, the Secretary of State did not notice that a consequence of the way in which he treated the CERN subscription would be that major areas of science research in this country would be wiped out. That is unacceptable.

If anything is needed to prove the culpability of the Secretary of State, it is the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, unique among his predecessors, has decided to keep secret the advice he has received from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. I hope that he will explain why that advice has been kept secret.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I have already explained that time is short, and I have been very generous in giving way to interventions.

In 1985, in response to a request from my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, now Lord Joseph, agreed that the advice that he received from the ABRC should be made public for the better information of Parliament, which votes the moneys for science, and of the public. That practice was commendably followed by each of Lord Joseph's successors.

To their credit, the right hon. Members for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) and for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) followed that practice even though they were not always able to agree with everything proposed by the ABRC. They had confidence in the decisions made, and the right hon. Member for Mole Valley was not scared to say, "This is what has been said to me by Sir David Phillips and his colleagues. This is what I have decided to do, and here are the reasons". In common with his predecessor and successor, the right hon. Gentleman was canny enough to recognise that the publication of the ABRC's advice strengthened his hand as Secretary of State in discussions with the Treasury.

In a characteristically high-handed and authoritarian approach, the present Secretary of State has decided that Parliament should not receive information that was previously publicly available. He has suddenly decided that that information, which is critical to the judgments that we should make about the science budget, should be suppressed. No explanation was offered for that decision, but the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science was put up to answer on 19 November, when he said that his right hon. and learned Friend

"considers that the advice that the board offers as part of the public expenditure survey should be confidential, as is normal for similar advice from other bodies such as the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1990; Vol. 181, c. 30.]

That is a putrid excuse. There is no parallel between the advice offered by the ABRC and that offered by the PCFC and the UFC.

It is a principle now that, whenever a Government-appointed committee offers advice that bears on the public expenditure survey, that advice should be kept secret. Does that mean that the views of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions, which has massive public expenditure implications, should have been made confidential? Does that mean that all sorts of other advice should be suppressed? That speaks volumes for the Secretary of State's approach to government and decision-making——

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It was my predecessor.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is trying to wriggle out of it. There is a simple way in which to deal with his predecessor's decision—he should now publish the ABRC's advice.

What is outrageous about the Government's attitude is that they treat decisions about the spending of public money on public institutions as though that money were private money. That is intolerable. In a democracy, such decisions should not be treated in that way.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I am not giving way.

On radio this morning, the Under-Secretary of State sought to say that the Secretary of State had accepted the advice of the ABRC when he made his decisions. Although the report from the ABRC has been suppressed, we are now being treated to selected quotations from it.

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman has accepted the ABRC's advice, why can we not see what advice he accepted? I do not believe for a second that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has accepted its advice as to the global size of the budget, because I do not believe that Sir David Phillips would be remotely confident about the budget that the Secretary of State has agreed. It may be

[Mr. Straw]

that the specific advice from the ABRC about which the Minister spoke this morning concerns the distribution of the total cake.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: That is right.

Mr. Straw: Well, if we are given a peep at the advice that the right hon. and learned Gentleman prays in aid, why can we not see the rest of the advice, so that we can see what the ABRC has recommended and measure that against the decisions that the Secretary of State has made? Why is the House continually denied that right?

The foundation of the science base must be laid in schools. There has been similar negligence and underfunding of the science base in schools as there has been of the science base of universities and research establishments. There is a severe shortage of technicians in schools. Oxford university conducted a survey of 16 to 19-year-olds on their attitude to science and technology. The researchers asked those questioned to rank 13 professions and, in terms of pay and status, I am sad to say that solicitors, doctors and accountants were top, with chemists, engineers and science teachers at the bottom. The researchers reported,

"the lack of government investment in research, and the low status, pay and morale of science teachers has deterred pupils from such work".

The recruiting problems associated with science teachers are well documented in the latest report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions, Cm. 1415. In paragraph 3.10, it states:

"recruitment is notably low in mathematics, physics and chemistry."

It also expressed anxiety at the quality of entrants to teacher training in those subjects and said that it was

"concerned that institutions may be finding it increasingly difficult to maintain even current entry standards."

Those standards are already far too low, and far too many are going into postgraduate teacher education in the key areas of science without the adequate degree qualifications. What is even worse is that half of those who teach maths or physics in school do not even have a post-A-level qualification in those subjects.

On top of the problem of a shortage of science teachers there is also the problem caused by the total incoherence of the Government's approach to science qualifications and science education post-16.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): It is in chaos.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. The Government talk about A-levels as the gold standard. When the Secretary of State examines the better science education record of other countries, he should recognise that all those other countries ensure that students do more than three subjects between the ages of 16 and 19. They study between five and six subjects so that, not least, a majority of those highly trained young people carry on studying at least one science to the age of 18. In this country, a minority of students study science post-16.

As the Gulf war has shown with terrifying illumination, the world's nations and people live and die by science. Britain was the first scientific nation. It was responsible for more discovery, invention and inquiry than any other nation of similar size. Today, however, the House must acknowledge that there is the deepest anxiety about the continuation of our science base.

That anxiety is coupled with a growing understanding that our appalling economic performance in the 1980s and now is linked to the lack of vision and funding for research and development and the science base by the Government. We need a Government who know that British science and Britain's future are inextricably linked, a Government ready to invest in Britain's future. From Labour, we shall have that Government.

7.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'applauds the steps being taken by the Government to sustain and improve still further the strengths and quality of science and science education in the United Kingdom; and notes in particular the successful implementation of the science, mathematics and technology components of the National Curriculum, efforts being made to increase the number of qualified science teachers, the increase in the age participation rate in higher education over the last decade from one in eight to one in five, the significant increase in the science budget since 1979, and the allocation of funds to improve our understanding of the global environment, which provide a sound base for British scientists to play a full role with their European partners, to improve the quality of life, and to underpin the technological competitiveness of British industry.'.

I begin by agreeing that, for all the reasons given by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and for many more reasons, it is extremely important that Britain gives proper importance to science and to scholarship and research in every part of our society. A strong science base is essential to not only Britain's economic well-being and competitiveness and its industrial base, but our status as a civilised nation. We want to remain in the forefront of discovery and the extension of the bounds of human knowledge, as we always have been.

The acquisition of modern technology and the application of science to human problems are important for the creation of wealth, as we are all aware, but they are also important for the solution of many other social and human problems. The pure spirit of intellectual curiosity is an important quality in its own right. In acknowledging that that is what we all desire, we should also acknowledge that the quality of British science today is outstanding and is internationally acclaimed. There is no evidence that the quality of scientific work done in this country is inferior to that done in any of our rival and competitor nations.

One of the several mistakes that the hon. Member for Blackburn made was to make his case so highly coloured that he wound up painting a picture of a nation in scientific and technological decline, which is the precise opposite of the truth and a grotesque overselling of his case, which was based on a narrow interpretation of some statistics and public spending figures. We could argue at length about how exactly the output of the scientific community should be measured. The measure that the hon. Gentleman used throughout his speech—if I heard him correctly—was the number of patents taken out in the United States of America, or something——

Mr. Straw: It was not "or something". It was the central conclusion of the Cabinet Office's own survey. It

decided that surveying United States patents was one of the fairest ways of comparing the scientific endeavour of various countries. It concluded that Britain was losing out.

Mr. Clarke: That was one of the conclusions of a document from which the hon. Gentleman quoted highly selectively. I quote the number of papers on basic and applied research published in the main scientific journals, which the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) will concede is a perfectly good measure of scientific achievement. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South will denounce the level of science practised in Britain or the level of our achievements.

Between 1981 and 1986—the years on which the figures are based—the United Kingdom percentage of the total world output production remained constant at 8·3 per cent. Germany's percentage has fallen from less than ours when it started—6·3 per cent.—to 5·9 per cent. France's percentage has fallen from 5·1 to 4·8 per cent. We have a strong science base in Britain and we should pay tribute to it and discuss, in a somewhat more dispassionate and sensible way than the hon. Gentleman is prepared to do, how we can support it and develop it in future.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: I should like to make a little progress before I start giving way.

In response to the last part of the hon. Member for Blackburn's speech, I agree with him that any serious long-term policy for science must start by securing an adequate supply of new, highly qualified scientists and engineers. The hon. Gentleman went in for a light and quick attack on the position of science in our schools and the way in which we are producing the next generation of scientists, engineers and technologists.

The background against which we are debating the subject is that science has been given an important new emphasis in our schools. For the first time, we have introduced science, technology and mathematics into the national curriculum. The national curriculum will ensure that every pupil from primary school to the age of 16 does maths, science and technology as part of a developing curriculum. That is a matter for debate in more detail on another occasion, but we are putting more science into our schools.

Let us consider what is already being achieved. The output from our schools feeds on to our higher education institutions. We all acknowledge that our universities, polytechnics and colleges must also turn out increased numbers of scientists and technologists.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I do not quarrel with what my right hon. and learned Friend says, but there is a special problem in girls' schools such as Aylesbury high school in my constituency. Such schools have a great deal of catching up to do to provide the same level of scientific provision as corresponding boys' schools. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider carefully the case for providing more in the way of scientific facilities to enable girls' schools to catch up with their boy counterparts?

Mr. Clarke: The introduction of primary school science for the first time and identical science teaching for girls and boys, covering the same fields, will make a difference. It has always been a curious pattern of the British education that very few girls study physics. It was an overwhelmingly male study. When girls continued with science, overwhelmingly they studied biology. In future, both boys and girls will cover either the same general science curriculum to the age of 16 or separate sciences, if they opt for that. That is an important change. I accept that some girls' schools where girls have not been accustomed to scientific education will have to adjust over a period of time and invest in kit and facilities.

Higher education needs to turn out more scientists and engineers of the same high quality that we have always achieved in Britain. They are doing that on a spectacular scale which the public do not seem to follow and certainly do not always acknowledge. I am glad to say that a dramatic change is taking place in the proportion of young people going on to higher education. Ten years ago, only one in eight young people in Britain entered higher education. This year the rate is one in five. We are well on course to make it one in four by the year 2000.

Numbers of students on science-related courses have made a more or less constant proportion of the rising total. We expect the higher proportion of pupils studying science in schools, to which I have just referred, to increase the proportion of young people who opt in future for science and engineering.

Let us consider the overall figures for science and engineering graduates. The total number of graduates leaving university in Britain has risen from 778,000 in 1979 to 1,061,000 in 1989. That is a 36 per cent. increase in the number of graduates coming out of British higher education during the Government's period of office, and the number is still rising. As the science and engineering proportion has risen slightly, a greatly increased number of scientists of both sexes and of high quality are coming into our community.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: With apologies to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) who tried to intervene earlier, I give way.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Secretary of State comment on a point that bothers the Royal Society of Chemistry? Relatively expensive substances such as silver nitrate, without which one cannot do analytical chemistry, are beyond the pockets of some universities. Does the Secretary of State have any thoughts on the provision of equipment, particularly for chemists?

Mr. Clarke: We have increased funding for universities by 10 per cent. for next year, which is ahead of inflation. Within that, science tends to take an ever-rising proportion. Not only silver nitrate but other equipment continually becomes more expensive. I shall consider the point at leisure after the debate.

Our projections of student numbers show that we shall have a further spectacular increase. The number of engineering graduates is projected to rise by some 15 per cent. from the 1988-89 figure to 15,000 by 1993-94. Science and mathematics graduates are projected to increase by one third to 28,000 over the same period. The background is a spectacular increase in the proportion of our young people going through our universities and the proportion who come out as scientists and engineers.

Before we denigrate the education system too much —I agree with everyone else that it should be improved

[Mr. Clarke]

—we must not get carried away by the foolish notion that our system is being left behind by our rivals and that we are not producing the right work force. Our education system is not all that bad—certainly not at the higher education level. We compare very well with all our most important competitors when it comes to young people with higher education qualifications in science. The figures for 1986—I believe that they are OECD figures, and they are the most up to date that I have—show that 15 per cent. of the relevant age group of young people had higher education qualifications in science. In France and in West Germany, only 12 per cent. had them. The figure for Italy is 5 per cent. We are up with the United States, at 11 to 15 per cent., depending on how the comparison is made, and with Japan at 10 to 15 per cent. So we are producing the numbers—*[Interruption.]* The percentage of the age group is a fair and constant comparison. I can think of no better way of comparing the output of our higher education institutions. Of course, the United States and Japan have larger populations, but we are producing as good a proportion of quality scientists.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The fallacy in the well-known figures that the Secretary of State has quoted is that they omit engineers. If they were included, we would fall far behind.

Mr. Clarke: I have just given the projections for an increase in the number of engineers. I look forward to the hon. Member for Motherwell, South producing a better form of comparison. We have already heard some foolish comparisons on scientific funding, with which I now want to deal.

The hon. Member for Blackburn said that he was not going to bandy figures, but he threw out the percentage of GDP that we spend on science. I know from my experience in health and in other Departments that comparisons based on percentages of GDP are pretty damned silly. People throw the figures at us at the moment because we had a record rate of growth in our gross domestic product throughout the 1980s. Other countries may increase the percentage of GDP spent on science by going into recession and a period of decline. The hon. Member for Blackburn said that we spend less as a proportion of GDP on civil research than Germany and France. However, using OECD figures again, it is clear that we spend more on civil R and D than do Japan, the United States, Belgium, Canada, Australia, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Greece—half the countries of the OECD. So it is foolish to suggest that we do not bear comparison with our competitors. What matters is what we are doing now and where we go next.

The hon. Member for Blackburn made a great deal of today's press release by the Science and Engineering Research Council. I assume that it was because he spotted that the council was to hold a meeting today that this debate is being held. On the strength of that, he built up a ludicrous case in which he maintained that the excellent British scientific base is somehow crumbling. Let us examine what the current year holds.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): May I remind the Secretary of State of the Select Committee report published in December 1990, paragraph 63 of which points out that "the UK is the only OECD country where growth in spending on research was less than growth in GDP"? That is why we are at the bottom of the international league.

Mr. Clarke: When a country's GDP rises quickly, funding may sometimes fall behind. When a country goes into steep economic decline, spending on science as a proportion of GDP may rise spectacularly. I have listed some formidable countries, most notably Japan and the United States, which still spend less than we do as a percentage of GDP on civil R and D. It is a daft comparison, but if we are to make it, the example of the United States and Japan is relevant.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): May I recruit my right hon. and learned Friend to the following idea? Will he bear in mind that the Procedure Committee has said that science and technology is too important a matter to be absent from the agenda of the House of Commons? It recommends that a Select Committee should deal with the matter jointly with the House of Lords, or that it should be dealt with as part of the work of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts. In that way some of these matters might be better understood in the House and I hope that I can count on my right hon. and learned Friend's support, with the Leader of the House, in moving in that direction.

Mr. Clarke: The composition of Select Committees is a matter for the House, not the Government. I know that there has been pressure for a Select Committee on Science for some time, and no doubt my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will deal with the matter.

Dr. Bray: The Secretary of State is a little confused about GDP. Science is not measured in tonnes, like steel. If scientists' pay goes up by no more than the national average, the so-called real measure of R and D expenditure increases proportionately to GDP, by definition. So-called level funding means a decline in research done and a decline in the number of scientists at the same rate at which GDP is growing. I shall back up that assertion with detailed figures later.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman will find on reflection that in most countries, and certainly in ours, the increase in incomes exceeds the growth of GDP. I cannot recall when the pay of any group of workers in this country, except possibly in the midst of the fiercest pay policies of the late 1970s, did not rise faster than GDP. It is no good trying to invent a special measure of inflation for a particular public service. If the hon. Member for Motherwell, South ever finds himself in the public service arguing a case against the Treasury, he will learn that every Department can produce special rates of inflation which it says apply only to itself. But the fact is that all pay and other pressures apply to the whole economy. The percentage of GDP is not very useful because GDP varies rather more than spending usually does. Trying to qualify the argument with talk of pay increases for scientists will not do.

This year, the Government's overall expenditure on research and development is more than £5·1 billion, of which £2·8 billion goes on civil research. That puts in proportion the tremendous fuss made by the hon. Member for Blackburn about £1 million or £2 million for the laboratory at Daresbury. Among the aspects for which I

am responsible, research undertaken at universities, polytechnics and higher education institutions will be funded at about £1·8 billion, of which expenditure through the research councils—the so-called science budget—forms just over half.

I have made it as clear as I can that the Government are committed to maintaining a healthy science base. We have demonstrated that commitment by keeping the science budget at a level that has enabled research councils to carry out leading-edge research at their own establishments and to fund high-quality research initiatives. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State correctly said on the radio this morning, the so-called science budget part of our overall spending has increased by 23 per cent. in real terms under this Government. Just two years ago it rose by 8 per cent. in real terms at one go; since then the figure has remained level. Nevertheless, funding has increased by almost a quarter in real terms since 1979. We cannot sustain that sort of increase every year and it is not possible to carry out in this or any other country every element of scientific research that people might want within such an expanding budget.

Seen against the background of a 23 per cent. increase in expenditure, the diatribes of the hon. Member for Blackburn can be seen in their true light. It is true that in 1991-92 the value of the underlying science budget will remain level in real terms. There is no fancy accounting in that. Lower figures could be produced by leaving out capital expenditure that has been completed. We have just finished an Antarctic survey ship which, I think, cost £36 million, and a new headquarters for the research councils in Swindon and have made some alteration in the timing of the payments of postgraduate fees. When those are left out and we get down to what matters, we find that the money that is available for scientific research willl be up by 6 per cent. next year in line with the forecast on inflation, and that is a level-terms year. There has been a substantial real terms uplift in the past, especially the big 8 per cent. uplift which took place two years ago.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that of the total research council budget spending only 2 per cent. is spent in Wales? Will he say whether the atmospheric radar station at Aberystwyth, which was opened by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales only two months ago, will continue to be funded by the research council?

Mr. Clarke: The distribution of funding is determined by scientific merit, not by geography. It should remain like that. As far as I am aware—I shall take advice and write to the hon. Gentleman—I do not think that at the moment there is any threat to the establishment at Aberystwyth.

Mr. Tony Lloyd *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) has been very patient. I shall now give way to him.

Mr. Lloyd: I have not really been patient. I listened with keen interest to what the Secretary of State said about the maintenance of the budget. Obviously, and whether he likes it or not, he will be influenced by what is achieved in practice. When we see facilities that have been centres of scientific excellence for many years threatened with closure we will tell the Secretary of State that something is going wrong. Not only Opposition Members will say that; it will be said by people outside. Jodrell Bank has been a world leader in its field for many years. It is under serious threat that could lead to its work being truncated and to its closure. How does the Secretary of State respond to that?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is correct when he says that there is concern in all parts of the House when a facility has a cut in its budget. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) is in his place and is no doubt following with interest the debate about Daresbury. I have been following the discussions about Jodrell Bank. It is not the case that the Universities Funding Council is reducing the funding of Jodrell Bank. There seems to be some dispute in Manchester university about whether that university can sustain it. I do not believe that Jodrell Bank is threatened.

We have had a large real-terms growth and a level funding base this year. I must now deal with decisions concerning the Science and Engineering Research Council.

The hon. Member for Blackburn completely failed to respond to a relevant comment which we are bound to make and which was put to him in an intervention. We have a 23 per cent. increase in real terms. No one can argue with that, unless he goes in for fancy accounting and says that there are special factors. When Labour was last in power, in 1974-75 and for 1979-80 there was no real-terms increase in the science budget. It was an ice age for the science budget when Labour was in power.

Difficult choices have to be made. The hon. Member for Blackburn did not tell us about any that he would make. Such debates are a permanent feature of scientific study throughout the world and are not confined to this country. Not only are we not behind our competitors, but we are having the same discussion as science communities in every part of the world. In the *New Scientist* of 2 February, under the so-called "Talking Point", there was an article by Mr. Daniel Greenberg, who is the editor of *Science and Government Reform*, which is an American publication. In that article, which Mr. Greenberg describes as

"The phony crisis in American science",

he states:

"Is American science sinking because of financial neglect? Leading scientists created this impression by besieging Washington with cries for more money. By all means take note of their pleas, but understand that much of their distress is their own making in collaboration with their politician friends."

In another part of the article Mr. Greenberg states:

"The reality is that science in America has never been bigger, richer or more productive than it is today. What is suffers from is an unrestrained appetite for doing all things possible by neglecting to set priorities for research."

If we are not careful, we could wind up substituting the United Kingdom for the United States in that article, because the choice of priorities which the hon. Member for Blackburn is plainly not prepared to make has to be made to get the best out of expenditure on science.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not listen to what I said. It is acknowledged in all parts of the House that choices have to be made. The crucial question is about the manner and circumstances in which they are made. What is objectionable is the process by which the SERC has been forced to make decisions which otherwise would not have to be made. Was the Secretary of State aware that the budget decisions would lead to the possibility of closures without any review at all of whether this country should stay in basic nuclear physics?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman always says that hard choices have to be made, but makes it quite plain that he would not make them, because he did not mention one. He talked a lot of nonsense which slightly implied that a Labour Government might spend more so that no choices would be made. He latched on to the defence of a victim of a choice that has been made by scientists.

Mr. Straw: That is bluster.

Mr. Clarke: It is not bluster. One of the biggest weaknesses of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen is that on all these matters they speak without conviction about facing up to difficult priorities. When they are challenged about where the money will come from to avoid the hard choices that they talk about, they either wander off into evasiveness or do not answer.

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): While accepting entirely that my right hon. and learned Friend is doing much good work, may I ask whether he agrees that there is something very odd when the procedure for funding CERN over which the research councils have no control means that we now have to consider shutting down an internationally well-known and important facility? Will he give an undertaking to have a look at that?

Mr. Clarke: It is an important point, but I shall not try to digress too long on it. We are making a major contribution to the CERN project. There are arguments about the wider impacts on investment in particle physics, at Daresbury, for example. In recent years the Government have looked at this several times. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science was at the Foreign Office and I was at the Department of Trade and Industry when we last looked at the matter in government. Tempting as it is from the point of view of scientific lobbyists—and I almost count myself among them because I am the Secretary of State for Education and Science—if we spend money on CERN at the behest of British scientists, that means public expenditure on nuclear physics. The idea that somehow it does not count if the money is spent in Switzerland and should not have any impact on what is left to spend in Cheshire is appealing but illogical.

Secondly, I can safely say that at one time the Government looked seriously at the question of withdrawing from CERN and discussed it with the scientific community. On the strength of much scientific advice to remain in CERN, we decided to do so. The discussions about CERN have been going on for years. It was at the British behest that we seriously addressed the question of the management, financial control and the scale of the investment in CERN. I was astonished to find when I came to this Department, having, as it were, passed through science when I was in the Department of Trade and Industry, that our present subscription to CERN is lower than it was some years ago because other countries, at the behest of Britain, have acted to improve the management of CERN.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: This must be the last intervention because other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: The increasing subscription, which is totally outside British hands, has thrown the CERN budget into total disarray.

Mr. Clarke: As I have just explained, matters have improved. It is still true that the CERN subscription which British scientists want us to continue has an impact on the money that we have available for other matters. I shall put that in context and try to deal with the immediate issues that have arisen at Daresbury and elsewhere.

The key question is how to distribute the money and how to make the difficult choices that the hon. Member for Blackburn would not be prepared to make. The advice from the research councils is channelled to me through the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. I rely on that advice about scientific and research priorities within our resources. In terms of the scientific merits, I keep an arm's-length relationship and the Secretary of State in any Government would be well advised to do the same. I am predisposed to accept that advice, and usually do. I have just accepted the ABRC's advice about the distribution of funds to the councils.

I think that the hon. Member for Blackburn would agree that in the end the difficult choices about priorities within the science budget should essentially be scientific decisions and not primarily political ones. That means that their difficult role is to give me advice, within the resources made available to them——

Mr. Straw: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. This is a short debate and many right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part. Some of these interventions might be saved either for the winding-up speech or the speeches that hon. Members make themselves.

Mr. Clarke: I will take your advice Mr. Deputy Speaker, particularly as the same point is being made in intervention after intervention.

It is important to realise that when a project is turned down the research councils are saying that there are better ways to spend money within the allocation made to them, and those better ways are based on scientific grounds. The overriding political responsibility is mine and I get advice on the scientific priorities. I feel that I should receive that advice in confidence. My predecessor, now the Leader of the House, made the wise decision not to publish this year's advice on the public spending round. I have decided not to publish the ABRC's full advice on the distribution of funds and, as has been said, we have followed the financial division between the councils that the advisory board recommended. When one has advisers of this kind, carrying out this role, the relationship is best one of confidential close advice, not one of public debate.

Mr. Straw: Why not?

Mr. Clarke: I do not have public debates with my civil servants. I am notorious for frequently not taking their advice. If a body has the key role of giving advice in confidence, but that advice is given in a public document to which I have to respond publicly, it becomes just another part of the public debate.

Mr. Straw: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: No, I am not giving way. The hon. Gentleman has harped on all day, both on the radio and here, about this point, and he is wrong. He accuses me of making what he calls a characteristically autocratic decision, but, as with many other parts of my portfolio, I am following the wise precedent set by my predecessor. I feel that the relationships with the research councils will be greatly improved when we stop having this megaphone debate and replace it with a close confidential relationship on scientific priorities.

The Government suffer a similar problem in arts with the Arts Council and in sport with the Sports Council. We allocate money, the research councils distribute it and the public debate concentrates on those projects that the research council will not be funding. The only scientific projects about which the public ever hears are the ones that have been refused priority or have suddenly lost priority vis-à-vis the rest of the scientific budget. They suddenly become centres of excellence—some of those affected today are centres of excellence. The radio schedule fills up with descriptions of, for example, a chap with a project who was on the point of breaking through on the method of transportation of some disease. All the projects that have been given higher scientific priority and have got the money do not see the light of day in the media. That is how it has gone this year.

All this gives me no chance to talk about the projects that the research councils are funding and that are producing excellent work. For example, there is the work by the Medical Research Council on autism, the breakthrough achieved by the Agriculture and Food Research Council in the Institute of Animal Health in sorting out the seal virus, the earthquake predictions method developed in this country, the tremendous work done on monoclonal antibodies by the MRC's laboratory of molecular biology. We never hear anything about those, although they are financed. We hear only about the ones that have lost out in this afternoon's agenda of the Science and Engineering Research Council because it decided to spend the money on something else that it judged to have higher scientific priority.

There is a difficulty for the SERC that is not of the making of the chairman and the people who assembled this afternoon. Sir Mark Richardson became the chairman in October 1990 and immediately made it clear that he wished to carry out a review of the excessive commitments, particularly to large projects, into which the SERC has entered. He initiated a moratorium on all new commitments on 21 November, which I am glad to say the SERC is now lifting. It made some announcements on 19 December. What has since happened is what is wrongly described as the £40 million shortfall. It is simply that the SERC had embarked on a series of commitments to a number of big projects and they were outrunning the resources given to the SERC, which was therefore not following its remit.

I congratulate the council not on individual decisions, although I can do that, but on its scientific expertise, which is better than mine. It knows what is to be cut out in the review. I am not able to compare the study of particle physics at Daresbury or at Strasbourg with the nuclear structure at Mainz, or nuclear physics as against some other part of the science and engineering budget. The SERC has cut back on commitments and it has had to be selective in doing so. Some of the other projects on which it has made cuts have not been mentioned. For example, it has said that it cannot contemplate for at least two years the gravitational wave detector project. That is an Anglo-German project which the Germans also want to postpone because they cannot afford it.

One can spend a fortune on space astronomy. I once faced a similar problem in getting us out of what I regarded as an extraordinary manned space project in which the European Space Agency and the French wanted us to invest, and did so with the full support of the research councils, although I was attacked by enthusiasts in the House of Commons for trying to save us millions of pounds on a mad international project that would have impacted on our domestic science. I also had a good run with the HOTOL project, and I got us out of spending a few billions on that—money that would have come out of the science budget. The councils are looking carefully at some of the space astronomy projects. The Americans have deferred similar projects for 12 months. Once one gets into this sort of research, the noughts on the end of the bill have an impact on the science budget.

Daresbury—on which we have just had the announcement—presented a difficult choice. It is our only accelerator devoted to basic research in nuclear physics. Irrespective of today's announcement, the SERC has already made it clear that it will continue support of nuclear structure physics and continue funding of individual experiments, and that the NFC agreement on Eurogam with the University of Strasbourg will not be terminated before there is an opportunity to exploit the project. Furthermore, United Kingdom nuclear physicists will have access to the Eurogam machine and be eligible for certain research grants. There will be collaboration between Daresbury and Strasbourg for the next year or two.

I could read, but I shall not, a list of projects that are going ahead under the patronage of the SERC. One of the first things that I did when I came to the Department was to open the new 32 m telescope at Cambridge which had been financed by the SERC. The council faces difficult decisions in astronomy which is an expensive big international science. I am glad that it has been able to lift the moratorium on the smaller grants. If it does not have the courage to carry out this fundamental review, the danger will be that commitment to big projects will roll on while key small grants to people operating in universities, where the future often lies, are put under a moratorium or cut.

We recognise the need for well-judged policies. I have explained to the House what they are. We are committed to a strong scientific base. We have an excellent record of scientific achievement and this is one of the most attractive places in the world to invest for anybody looking for high-quality science. The Government will support research councils in the difficult choices that they have to make when distributing the resources available to them. We shall commit to science those resources that the country can afford and hope to build on our excellent record.

At the behest of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) I recently had a meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister, with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and many distinguished scientists who came to discuss this matter. The Prime Minister emphasised his personal interest in science and his determination to continue to chair, from time to time, meetings of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology and to

[Mr. Clarke]

continue the practice of his predecessor of chairing all meetings of the Cabinet committee that was set up specifically to deal with science matters across the Government. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Havant will agree that the Prime Minister listened with considerable interest to pleas from distinguished scientists for continuity of funding, and for a strategic look at where we are going on science. With the research councils, we shall try to take that look.

I urge the House to accept that this sudden explosion of rage about the consequences of one research council meeting this afternoon and the bandying of selective figures do not accurately give a picture of British science. We have some of the best scientists in the world. Some of the greatest achievements in the world of science are made in the United Kingdom and the Government have demonstrated their support in the most practical way by putting resources into science and by developing schools and higher education systems in such a way that we shall produce further generations of equally good scientists and technologists in ever-greater numbers.

8.29 pm

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): I do not enter the debate as a scientist, an engineer, or even a technologist, and I suspect that the same is true of the Secretary of State, having listened to him read from a close script about the various scientific——

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Written by me.

Mr. Ingram: That may be, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman appeared to be reading closely some of the technological details.

I have worked in industry, spending a long period in the electricity supply industry as a computer systems analyst, and I have always taken a close interest in science, whether pure science or technological development.

For many years—irrespective of what the Secretary of State has said, I tend to support the arguments advanced from the Opposition Front Bench in terms of statistics —there has been a steady decline in research and development and in pure science in Britain. Much of that has clearly been the result of lack of foresight on the part of industry. It has not been investing in the way in which our international competitors have. We can see that in the way in which we lose out in international markets and the way in which our trade in those areas has been declining.

What was happening in science and research and development was brought home to me when I entered the House in 1987. I do not wish to go into all the details associated with my point, but I am referring to the Government's attempt, in effect, to disable the National Engineering Laboratory in my constituency, which was and still is a world-renowned research establishment undertaking engineering research projects, some of which are not carried out anywhere else in the United Kingdom and possibly even the world. American universities send people to that establishment to use its facilities.

On 27 May 1988, Dr. Donald Bell, then director of the laboratory, said:

"The range of services provided by NEL in the mechanical engineering field is unique. Not only do we have facilities that would be difficult to match—for example, the strong floor used for structural testing and the flow measurement laboratory—but the collective expertise of our staff and the number and variety of testing rigs here are unrivalled."

In 1988 Lord Young, then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, announced that the NEL was to be privatised on the incredibly short-sighted basis that it had to become profit making. A laboratory which had established itself in the forefront of research and development for 40 years all of a sudden had to become profit making. Industry was not asking for that; the Government made the decision.

The decision was made in the face of major opposition from industry, some of which was never heard about in the public forum but which we knew took place. The industry made representations to the Government that it needed the research facility. To privatise it in the way proposed would have been detrimental to some of the key industries in the Scottish economy and throughout the United Kingdom.

The noble Lord Young, in his ideological zeal and determination to get rid of the establishment, was prepared to give it away at a knock-down price to a French-owned company. Sell it off to the foreigners, we no longer want it, was the philosophy of the then Secretary of State.

The work force, the trade unions and the wider industry reacted strongly against that dogmatic proposal. As a result of that campaign the Government were forced into a U-turn. Since Lord Young left office there have been many other failed Secretaries of State in the Department of Trade and Industry, but all have continued to look for ways to dispose of that valuable asset regardless of the impact that that would have on the local economy in Scotland and on British engineering.

In the past two years, more than 200 members of staff at the laboratory have been disposed of and the question whether it can be commercially viable now arises. Some of those who are no longer with the laboratory were the brightest and best among engineering research scientists in Britain today. They were disposed of because it was decided that there had to be a cut in that area. The laboratory is now fighting for its survival against a hostile Government who want it to achieve 70 per cent. to 80 per cent. funding from commercial contracts by 1995, compared with 20 per cent. funding from that source now.

The Secretary of State says that the Government have a great commitment towards research and development, but that example alone tells me otherwise. They have put a major resource at risk on the basis of the Secretary of State's dogmatic approach, resulting in the disposal of some key scientists. What happened and is continuing to happen at that establishment is indicative of the Government-created malaise which now afflicts the majority of manufacturing research and development and broader scientific research in Britain.

I know of no British scientist, eminent or otherwise, who is not outraged by the rapid decline in state support in this area. The weight of opinion is against the Secretary of State. It is not a case of bandying around statistics; this is what the practitioners in the field are saying is happening to their area of research. It is not just our domestic scientists who are saying that; scientists from countries with whom we collaborate and against whom we compete in international markets are amazed at the way in which the first-class reputation of British science has been steadily eroded.

I will not quote the figures that I had intended to give to show the decline in research and development. Instead, I will quote from a press release from the Royal Society dated 8 January 1991, to which I was not allowed to refer in an intervention. That is a prominent body, not one to come to its conclusions lightly or even to make mistakes in its calculations. The press release is headed:

"Royal Society launches major enquiry into UK science policy".

That seems to show some concern in that area. I shall not quote it all, but it says:

"Over the last 10-15 years there have been major structural changes in the conduct of and framework for scientific research in the UK. Some of these changes have been unintended results of policies implemented for other purposes and are having serious consequences for the health of UK research. Examples of structural changes include the following:

The proportion of general national expenditure on R and D financed by Government sources dropped from 50 per cent. in 1983 to 37 per cent. in 1988;

Government expenditure on the Science Base has declined steadily from 0·35 per cent. of GDP in 1981 to 0·28 per cent. now".

That is significantly different from what the Secretary of State was saying. Does he repudiate the Royal Society's figures? With regard to the health of our educational establishments, the Royal Society goes on to say:

"1,200 permanent science and engineering posts in universities have been lost since 1979".

That does not seem to me to show the healthy state of our scientific community. I would be interested to hear the Minister's reaction to that when he replies.

At a time of recession, when one needs to find a way out of the problems that the economy faces, it is scarcely credible that there should be a massive cut of £28·5 million in real terms in pure science. One of the bleakest pieces of evidence of cuts that I have seen is that by 1993-94 the United Kingdom will be spending less in real terms on the work of all five United Kingdom research councils than in 1990-91. That is happening at a time when we should be spending more to compete in a highly competitive world.

It is because of all those points, which have been highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), that the scientific community is now in a state of ferment. We should remember also that these scientists are not motivated by political point scoring. They are reluctantly coming forward to politicians to ask them to argue their case. They are not used to it. I was telephoned the other night by a professor asking me to sign an EDM. I thought that he knew what an early-day motion was, but he did not. He is a professor of pure science. I gave him the background. That shows how remote scientists are from what happens here. They think that if they talk to a Member of Parliament and ask him to sign a statement, the Government will respond. I had to tell him otherwise. Perhaps I was able to educate that professor. Scientists are not motivated by political point scoring against the Government, but they know what is happening in research and development establishments and in universities.

It is probable that the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury will be closed. I see the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler), whose constituency it is in. I will listen with interest to what he says in the debate, and I shall be even more interested to see which Division Lobby he goes into at the end of the debate.

Debates here may be hot-tempered, but the nuclear facility has been described by Claude Detraz, chairman of the Associated Committee for Nuclear Physics at the European Science Foundation, as "world class". He goes on to say of those working at Daresbury:

"In their selected field of activity UK scientists have gained recognised leadership."

The *New Scientist* of 2 February 1991—again, an independent publication—states:

"At a time when nuclear physics in Britain is acknowledged as an internationally successful area of research, the country will soon find itself with fewer nuclear physicists than Iraq. What is going on?"

What, indeed, is going on? When British scientists develop into world-class performers like those at Daresbury, what is their reward? The Government have told them that there will be reduced funding, and have left the scientific community to get on with implementing cuts. The scientific community is being left to make the harsh decisions. That is being done against a background of no proper consultation and no proper inquiry into what is happening in the scientific community. That is why the Royal Society has had to undertake the role.

The Secretary of State said that the debate had been generated because of excitement which had been whipped up unnecessarily. Before the debate was arranged, I was approached by Dr. Jim Kellie, whom I had never met before, a nuclear physicist who lives in my constituency. He passed to me a copy of a letter from Sir Mark Richmond, chairman of the Science and Engineering Research Council. Sir Mark said:

"I fully recognise that the nuclear science facility acts as a focus for much of the nuclear structure physics programme. Its closure will reduce substantially SERC's support for the subject, but not remove it completely. We are under considerable pressure as a result of recent Government decisions on funding and it is, I am afraid, inevitable that some areas of science will be hard hit."

That letter was from the chairman of SERC itself, again someone who is not involved in the political to-ing and fro-ing of the House, but a cold dispassionate scientist who is concerned about what is happening in the world in which he is a professional. What he says is at variance with everything that the Secretary of State said.

The Secretary of State mentioned the Eurogam programme. In preparing for the debate, I found it interesting to note that the Eurogam programme is one year ahead of anything else, certainly in the USA. That means that British nuclear scientists are leading the field in a key area of nuclear research. The photon tagger, which is also linked with the nuclear debate, was developed and built by Glasgow and Edinburgh universities. Again that is developmental work at the very forefront of world research.

If those facilities are closed down or put at risk, two things will follow. First, the highly talented British scientists who are currently working in the facilities will see their years of hard work destroyed at a stroke; that will inevitably lead to them going abroad to continue their research, and we shall lose talented scientists. Secondly, it will mean that the culture of pure science at British establishments, the excitement among young scientists and the energy that they put into the years of work to produce results for the good of the nation will be lost. When we lose talented people and projects in that way, no young, bright scientists will come forward in the future. We can turn them out of our universities by the thousand, but if there is no work for them, they will go abroad.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Hurry up.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Member shouts from a sedentary position, but I intend to debate in my own time. If the hon. Member has a point to make, let him make it.

The overall effects of the cuts, not just in the programmes that I have mentioned, will mean that in years ahead Britain will be without trained nuclear scientists, at a time when we need more trained personnel because of the demands of decommissioning nuclear power stations and because of environmental studies.

The savings being made now may be written off as small beer by the Secretary of State, but they will cost us dear in the future. There is nothing sensible or constructive about the Government's policy on British science and research and development. At best it is a Luddite policy of the worst sort. It has become sadly apparent what the Prime Minister meant when he talked about a classless society. The message from the decisions on science to the young scientists in the classrooms of Britain today is that there is no point in going to class because in the long run their talent will no longer be needed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Time is getting very short, and many hon. Members wish to speak.

8.47 pm

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): Everyone realises that we are under great pressure. We are grateful to the Opposition for making time for the debate. I regret very much that there has not been a full-scale debate on the subject for six years, but my perspective goes back further. When the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) talked about resource allocation in the sense of a relationship between expenditure on science and science policy and the immediate consequences, he was starting at the beginning of the 1980s; he said that the consequences were felt almost immediately in that decade. With that I disagree.

It is important to note that we are looking at a much more fundamental and much longer-scale relationship, especially between the work in pure science and the subsequent benefit to society. We should consider a period of 15 to 20 years. It is for that very reason that, generally speaking, when we get into these debates we tend to get locked into statistical argument and inevitably pick up the language of those who write to us and properly protest.

Of course, as the Secretary of State said, we are not a nation in scientific decline. If any of us thought that, we probably would not be here and we would be taking a much more serious view of the whole thing. What are the questions we should be asking ourselves?

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Is this a joke?

Sir Ian Lloyd: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene?

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman said that if science was in decline we would all be elsewhere. Surely we would be here, bringing it to people's attention.

Sir Ian Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman has misinterpreted me. We would certainly be taking it far more seriously than we are. We would be here much more often and we would be taking evidence from a much wider spectrum of opinion.

We are not talking about total funding or about the national division between total expenditure on research and total expenditure on development. We are not discussing the structural division between the public and private sectors or about the divisions even within each sector. These are immensely important topics. Where should fundamental science be done? In a world in which what is described as big science is unavoidably international, how much should be done, in which fields, and who should pay? How should the burden fall, and how should adjustments be made?

Many legitimate differences of opinion are possible. Statistics inevitably envelop most arguments, and they are neither conclusive nor dispensable—but they are often revealing. However, it would be unfortunate to adopt the view that such discussion, because it is difficult, should become increasingly confidential. I also regret that the 1990 report of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils has not been made available, because that published in 1989 was of immense value.

The statistics are not encouraging. There is profound and widespread concern in the scientific community that is greater than any I have experienced since I first entered the House. That concern has existed for many years, and has been gravely aggravated by inflation—particularly that affecting the price of new and expensive highly technical equipment. The identifiable problems will be alleviated, but not solved by higher funding alone. That is a necessary but not a sufficient condition.

When I last spoke on this subject, I ended with the word "priorities". The latest analysis of public expenditure figures for 1993-94, which was published yesterday or the day before, shows for the first time the extremely interesting figures for expenditure per head.

Total Government expenditure per head of the population in 1989-90 was the large sum of £2,431. Of that, research and development on defence accounted for £45; education and science, £33; Department of Trade and Industry, £7; energy, £3; and others, £5—making a total of £93, leaving £2,338 remaining. Of that sum, no less than £1,426 was spent on health and social security—£513 on the former, and £913 on the latter; £361 on education; and £551 on other areas.

Those figures inject a degree of perspective, as they reveal also that we spend £257 million on the running costs of leisure centres. That kind of imbalance is seldom discussed in the House. That sum is equal to £4·5 gross per head of the population, and £2·5 net. The Science and Engineering Research Council deficit this year of £8 million is equal to 0·39p per head of the population. If the figure is £14 million next year, that will be equal to 0·69p. That figure is seldom related to, and weighed in the balance against, the £2,431 of total expenditure per head of the population. Only debates of the kind that have not been held for six years, particularly in respect of science funding, can reveal such disparities.

It is no use trying to apportion blame without taking a longer perspective. We should ask ourselves what is the critical path analysis of recovery from now until the year 2005, what policies are required, and what should be the distribution of expenditure. Those questions cannot be answered without a great deal of work and analysis, although we may make guesses.

However, we can identify the critical path analysis arrived at by Japan for the years 1960 to 1965, which yielded that country's dominance today. I use that word advisedly, having read two reports from the British embassy in Tokyo, which undoubtedly confirm that

judgment. Could we have emulated the Japanese? I have no doubt that we could have done so—but, both then and now, the answers would be different. However, Germany, Japan and the United States are not weakening their basic science.

Whatever we do, we must identify and support the critical path network for research and development in the United Kingdom, which involves taking a forward perspective—however difficult that may be—of at least 15 or 20 years. If that were done, right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House could try to agree a common basis and set of objectives. As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, we must create greater public awareness of the relationship between today's education and science and tomorrow's fundamental science, for the standard of living that will exist in 2010 will clearly depend on its application.

The Overseas Technical Information Service summary of the Japanese "White Paper on Science and Technology 1990" makes several significant comments:

"Supported by scientific and technological development, Japan has matured into an economic giant that produces 14 per cent. of the world's GNP. In recent years, the people's consciousness has been transformed in the midst of this economic prosperity, and they now wish to live their lives in comfort and fulfilment . . . Rather than analysing the contribution which science and technology make to economic growth, the paper considers their roles from the standpoint of ordinary people, and attempts to show how science and technology contribute to the creation of a satisfying life based upon comfort and fulfilment".

That philosophy is increasingly reflected in so much that is coming not only from Japan but from elsewhere.

Right hon. and hon. Members who visited the extraordinary exhibition staged by Hitachi in London a couple of weeks ago found that philosophy clearly stated in the documentation available at that event. Hitachi alone spends £2·7 billion on research and development, and employs 16,000 people at 33 research and development establishments worldwide. That development certainly has taken place within my lifetime, and probably within the past 20 to 25 years.

We must give priority to a policy of defining the critical path and following it, backed by all the resources and political will that we can muster.

I shall make one more contribution towards perspective in this debate because from time to time it is helpful to discover that our situation is not unique to the present time. In 1855, Newton's biographer, Sir David Brewster, said:

"It is from the trenches of science alone that war can be successfully waged and it is in its patronage and liberal endowment that nations will find their best and cheapest defence."

That was 150 years ago, and it is certainly as true today as it was then. He dedicated the volume to His Royal Highness Prince Albert with these words:

"whose views, were they seconded, by statesmen willing to extend education and advance science, would raise our country to a higher rank than it now holds."

I do not know what a similar biographer would say today, but I have an idea that, if he viewed the spectrum of argument and information that have been put before us, he would reach a similar conclusion.

8.59 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I shall be as brief as possible, because I realise that many other hon. Members wish to speak. The hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) also wishes to make a contribution because, like me, he wants to bat not only for Warrington but for Britain and world science.

I must pay tribute to the contribution made by the hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), who is an esteemed Member of the House, and is knowledgeable about his subject. I contrast his style and knowledge with the stance of the Secretary of State in the debate. I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is new to his office, but we have often clashed when he has held other offices.

Naturally, I wish to mention the Daresbury laboratory, because it is important to Warrington and to world science. The Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, in its report, called upon the Government to ensure that our scientific endeavours became international in character. The report pointed out that there was a need for Britain

"to develop and strengthen her international links in order to retain her place in world science."

The report also outlined some of the major weaknesses in British science, describing them as

"areas in which a concerted Government response is essential if Britain is to face the challenge of Europe."

Unfortunately, despite the Secretary of State's soothing words, we appear to be going in the opposite direction. That is why I welcome this debate, as did so many hon. Members before me. Although the Secretary of State pointed out that Daresbury has about two years to go, the sword of Damocles is hanging over it.

Daresbury is the only experimental nuclear physics facility in the United Kingdom, and there is no doubt that it conducts research of the highest international standard. It is a world leader in its field, and operates one of the most successful particle accelerators. In addition, the laboratory has contributed to many important collaborative ventures. By any standards, the nuclear structure facilities at Daresbury are of world class. Scientists abroad regard it as the "jewel in the crown" of the Science and Engineering Research Council, and have written to me on the subject.

The only way to give the facility a long-term future, and to save it, is to put in more funds. Yet all that I have described is to be sacrificed for the paltry sum of £8 million, which is unbelievable to people abroad and to the many people who have written to the centre. I have a large number of their letters here tonight. They do not come only from people in this country but from Japan, America, Germany and France. In all the letters that have poured in, they have said that they could not understand why the Government are doing this to a facility which is world-renowned—nor can I, and nor can the people who work at Daresbury.

There is not merely the question of the direct effect upon the 150 people who work there, many of whom live in my constituency. The indirect effects must be considered too. Even at this late stage, can we remove that sword of Damocles? Having listened to the Secretary of State tonight, I am not comforted. Indeed, leaving the present Government in charge of scientific research is like leaving Dracula in charge of a ward full of anaemics, and then wondering why they do not recover.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman had better persuade his union sponsors to employ a new script writer.

Mr. Hoyle: I take no notice of the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), the Secretary of State's Parliamentary Private Secretary. He is trivial at all times; triviality is second nature to him.

Let me tell the Secretary of State that, instead of leaving a fertile plain on which plants can grow high, he is creating a desert on which little now grows and on which, if he continues with his present course, nothing will grow in the future.

9.5 pm

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Next week, the more romantic of us will be tempted to say it with flowers. If the beloved lives abroad, Interflora may oblige; the problem is that, given what the pound sterling can buy when translated, a fabulous spray can become a rather disappointing pot plant. The trouble is that the pound sterling is first translated into an international currency, the fleurin, which is based on the Swiss franc. What the pound sterling can buy here often loses in purchasing power abroad because of the relationship with the Swiss franc.

We are now confronting exactly the same problem with regard to nuclear physics. The £60 million-a-year contribution that we make to CERN is related to the Swiss franc and to Swiss inflation; that means an unexpected contribution to CERN of an extra £10 million this year. Two thirds of the £90 million SERC budget for nuclear physics already goes to CERN, while an extra £20 million goes to support individual CERN scientists, leaving only £9 million or £10 million for the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury, which, as we have already heard, is under threat.

I make a direct connection between the threat to the nuclear structure facility and the overbudget on CERN. It appears that the nuclear structure facility may be sacrificed because of that extra contribution, to which I gather that the press release mentioned by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) also referred. The Daresbury structure is being nibbled away for the sake of big science abroad, with big budgets being spent to achieve limited results—in contrast to the excellent results being achieved at Daresbury.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), the former Prime Minister, visited Daresbury only last July; I was with her. She said that she was most impressed and later wrote:

> "It was clear that the Laboratory is at the frontiers of research in several fundamental areas, and I do hope that this will receive the international recognition it deserves."

Dr. Akito Arima, president of the university of Tokyo, wrote that Daresbury was

> "the most important center for nuclear physics in the world".

The United Kingdom is the world leader at present, but it will not be able to maintain that status if the facility is destroyed and if we no longer produce philosophy doctorates in the subject. If the facility closes, a number of postgraduates will lose their PhDs as it is—at least nine from Birmingham university alone. Deleting nuclear physics is not the act of a Government who are committed to the future of science in this country.

The Conservative-dominated Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts has said:

> "The UK is undoubtedly disadvantaged by the amount of funding devoted to scientific research. On the basis of Government funded civil R and D as a percentage of GDP, the UK is not as well funded as Italy, France, Sweden, or Germany".

That may seem pretty damn silly to the Secretary of State, but it strikes me as pretty damn telling.

The Advisory Board for the Research Councils wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend on 18 December. I seem to have come across the letter; perhaps it fell off the back of a lorry. The letter says:

> "The proportion of the nation's wealth deployed through the science budget will have declined by 15 per cent. between 1981 and 1994. . . . This will make it difficult to sustain scientific excellence. . . . These cutbacks . . . widen the disparity with research budgets in other advanced countries."

I am not necessarily suggesting that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to produce millions of pounds out of a hat in order to re-establish our credentials in the science world or to save the nuclear structure facility. However, it is unfair that SERC should have to bear the whole cost of undoing problems that are not of its own making. It is unfair that the nuclear structure facility should be given the chop on the basis of rising costs when its own costs have been declining.

CERN appears to be sacrosanct and ring-fenced, whereas the rest of the science budget needs to be ring-fenced from CERN. There is a precedent for this. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) knows well, the British Library, because of its voracious nature, was ring-fenced from the rest of the arts budget. It kept eating into the arts budget. That ring-fencing was probably done against Treasury resistance, and I am sure that the Treasury would not be keen on ring-fencing CERN. Nevertheless, I have three possible lifelines for my right hon. and learned Friend, and I hope that he will accept one of them.

First, the CERN budget could be renegotiated. The Foreign Office is understandably reluctant to do that. After all, it might offend our European partners—though I cannot imagine why such sensitivity should be shown so recently after such disunity on the European political front. I could understand a modicum of embarrassment on the part of the officials having to renegotiate. After all, it would imply an element of carelessness in failure to solve the root problem at the previous stage of renegotiation. Thus, to save the face of officials, the NSF is about to be sacrificed. There are snags in this course. First, it will undermine our reputation as a reliable scientific collaborator. Secondly, CERN's problems will only re-emerge. I understand that it is planning to spend an extra £0·5 billion on a big new facility in Switzerland. What will next be sacrificed on the altar of the massive "Z" bosom of CERN? Will it be the rest of Daresbury? Will it be the astronomy budget? In my view, procrastination is not a viable option.

Secondly, the Government could renegotiate the host contribution to CERN. I understand that the hosts make a profit six times greater than their contribution to CERN. Of course, the savings from such a renegotiation would be uncertain, and they might come only in the medium term, but the savings from closing the NSF would also only come in the medium term because of the massive redundancy costs involved. I should like to hear from the Secretary of State a pledge that he is prepared to renegotiate the host country's contribution.

Thirdly—and perhaps most important—my right hon. and learned Friend could draw down on the aptly named flexibility margin, the ABRC's back pocket. In 1992-93

and in 1993-94 the ABRC has put 2 per cent. more than usual in its back pocket. If it were to bring that back to its normal 2 per cent. flexibility margin it would have vast amounts of money—enough money to save the NSF and probably to remove the other areas of pressure in the science budget at the moment. The back pocket amount for 1992-93 is £39 million, and the amount for 1993-94 is £60 million.

It is odd to quote the arm's-length principle in response to this argument. After all, the demise of the NSF, if it comes about, will be the result of Government policy. There will be precious little use in quoting the arm's-length policy to a drowning man.

I have mentioned three lifelines for the NSF and the science budget. I trust that my right hon. and learned Friend will pick up one of them and throw it to them rather than remain aloof.

9.14 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): There is more to this important subject than an argument about taxpayers' money. We must recognise that the Government cannot give the scientific community a blank cheque and that the public spending implications must be realistically borne in mind. It is entirely reasonable to expect industry and commerce to fund a considerable proportion of research, and not necessarily only in the sphere of applied science, upon which industrial money tends to be concentrated in the universities at present.

There are some companies in the United Kingdom with a notable record on carrying out even blue-sky research. They have often benefited from it, as we see from the register of patents worldwide. Remarkable in that is the pharmaceutical industry. The statistics reveal that it invests about £1 billion per annum on research and development. That is a significant and productive sum. It is an example to the rest of British industry, and it is right to say in a debate such as this that the part which does not invest to any significant extent in research and development should consider sponsoring scientific study to a much greater degree. The industrial sponsoring and support of research falls far short of what is now a well-established tradition in the United States of America. There, corporate involvement, particularly in the work of advanced science and engineering laboratories, is well established.

However, there is an important, perhaps dominant place for Government funding. The support given by the Government to science and technology should be proportional to the need perceived and the potential advantage that can be obtained. The raw fact that Italy, France, Sweden and Germany—countries with a way of life and an infrastructure strikingly similar to our own—support scientific research at a level in real terms up to 50 per cent. more than the United Kingdom does not tell the story fully without considering need and achievement.

Fortunately, in terms of need, the Government have had the wisdom to perceive that there is a serious deficit in science education and training. Unfortunately, with an equal and opposite lack of perception, they have failed to take the steps required to meet that need and to fill the deficit. Many examples can be given. There is not time to list them all in the debate, but one striking example can be found in the considerable, continuing and miserable shortage of good quality science teachers. In the interests of brevity, I shall make but one point which shows that to be the case and demonstrates the failure of Government policy towards science education.

The Government's bursary scheme, which attempts to lure people into teaching as a second career, has failed already. Taking physics, chemistry and biology together, one would have expected the bursary scheme to be showing an increase in the number of applicants for places on courses in those subjects for the postgraduate certificate in education, but that has not happened. In 1989 there were 898 applicants for those places; in 1990 it was down to 840 and in 1991 it was down to 822. So, despite the bursary scheme, we are producing fewer science teachers. We may be producing many science graduates, but the Secretary of State should visit Lloyd's, the stock exchange, accountancy firms or the non-scientific parts of the Civil Service, the tax inspectorate or the factory inspectorate. He will find plenty of people with science degrees there because those jobs pay better than teaching science in schools. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) thinks that this is a funny subject. Perhaps she has not looked at the statistics.

As one looks at secondary schools, it is obvious that there is still a crying need for further measures to be taken to introduce into the education system for the first time —the problems are not just the fault of this Government —a quality and quantum of teaching that would meet the need. This is not a problem that one would see in anything like the same way in the colleges or lycées of France or the gymnasiums of Germany, where we would find a much higher level of achievement in bringing people from business and the professions into science teaching than there is currently any sign of achieving here.

Before we can ask the Government to fund British scientific research, we must ask whether it is worth funding. On the basis of the evidence, the answer must be that of course it is, and it is worth funding on the evidence of achievement and potential achievement more extensively than is so at present.

We have heard much about Daresbury. I emphasise that the hon. Members for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) were right about the potential damage to the United Kingdom's reputation as a country of scientific excellence if the effect of changes in the funding of the Science and Engineering Research Council means that Daresbury has to close.

Professor Detraz was mentioned earlier. In his comments to Sir Mark Richmond, he said:

"All members of NuPECC were amazed and horrified to learn of a proposal by SERC to remove much of its funding for Nuclear Physics. This would close the world-class SERC facility at Daresbury, and renege on its formal agreement".

That is quite an accusation to make against the Government and the British scientific community, but it is justified and true.

The hon. Member for Warrington, South spoke of the effect that that will have on young PhD postgraduate students, not only at Birmingham university, which he mentioned, but at other United Kingdom universities. The effect is obvious. There are jobs elsewhere for them and the brightest and best will leave the United Kingdom. Brilliant young British scientists are working at universities in the United States, and some in universities of the European Community, not only because jobs are available for them but because the effect of decisions such as that taken in

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

relation to Daresbury is to undermine the confidence of young scientists in this country. It will undermine the confidence not only of those whose PhD theses are based on what is happening at Daresbury but of PhD students in other scientific disciplines, particularly the expensive ones, who may have a great contribution to make but feel that it can be made more securely elsewhere.

In a spirit of realism, I recognise that SERC can be criticised for over-optimism in the past. Whether that is a fair criticism is another matter. There are three major influences other than overheating based on optimism. The first is international subscriptions. As we heard the effect of those from the hon. Member for Warrington, South, I shall not repeat him. The second is a factor which should be borne in mind but has not been mentioned—the gap between agreed university salary settlements and SERC's agreed public expenditure outcome. I understand that every 1 per cent. of university salaries costs SERC £1 million for the year. This has not been taken sufficiently into account. The third influence is the poor public expenditure outcome. Bearing in mind the other factors, it is impossible to plan international science with a see-sawing public expenditure outcome: £12 million this year, on a budget of £450 million, and £35 million last year —it speaks for itself.

Annuality is causing disease for SERC. Annuality means that it is inevitable that it will be less efficient than it could be and that science has a less than happy future. For SERC, some form of indexation is needed just to enable scientific research in this country to run hard to stand still.

The advice that the Secretary of State has received must have been along the lines of the Yugoslav proverb: situation desperate, not serious. It is high time that Ministers realised that for scientific research in this country the situation is now both desperate and serious, and that proper funding should be given to it.

9.24 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I am grateful to you for calling me to speak in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as time is short, I shall be brief.

First, I must declare an interest in the sense that for most of my working career as a lawyer I have represented a university. Although I no longer practise as such, my law firm represents a number of higher education institutions.

The debate arises on an Opposition motion which is absolutely typical of just about every Opposition motion we have ever heard on education in recent years. It starts with an attack on the Government for not spending enough money, follows up with an implication—I use the word advisedly—that the Labour party would spend more if it were in government and had a chance to do so, and rapidly avoids taking any line on any of the hard decisions which must be made, if one accepts that there is a limited overall budget for science and education, as for most other subjects.

Most people who have attended this debate will accept, as I accept readily, that there are a number of important areas of public expenditure that could usefully use more or less whatever sums of money are made available to them. The national health service is one, to which I would add science and research. As knowledge is infinite, so the sums that one can spend on pursuing research are infinite. The reality is that we must judge priorities. A great deal of this debate has been about how to select priorities.

I would not want politicians to have to determine those priorities on a detailed basis. The only way to make the difficult judgments between one person's work and that of another and between one area of research and another is by peer group assessment. That may result in some hard decisions. It may well be that my right hon. and learned Friend will have to defend those decisions in the House, but he is absolutely right to say that, as a matter of principle, the advice that he receives should be kept confidential between him and those who advise him. It is for him to defend the judgments made based on the advice he receives.

We have some fundamental failings within the United Kingdom. It is not that the Government spends inadequately. We have had an interesting canter over the course on statistics. In reality, any objective look at the statistics between the developed countries over the past 10 years shows that the British Government spend tolerably well compared with most of their competitors. The real difference arises in the fact that the United Kingdom private sector pays significantly less than in Germany, the United States and Japan.

United States expenditure on research and development is heavily pump-primed by defence expenditure. It is not a realistic model for us to follow. The models of Japan and, to a lesser extent, Germany are relevant to us. In Japan, for every pound of Government spending on research and development there is about £6 from Japanese industry. The figure for Germany is nothing like as much, but it is still substantially more than pertains in the other developed countries.

In addressing that problem, we must consider what the Government could have done during the 1980s to redress the imbalance in the private sector and to what extent the Government have already succeeded. There are some outstanding exceptions in the private sector of British industry, some of which have been referred to, and I should not like in any way to diminish the contribution of many fine companies and many sectors of industry. But to take the figures overall, it seems that the private sector neither invests enough in research and development, nor gets enough from the publicly funded research and development in higher education institutes.

I disagree fundamentally with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). It does not matter to me whether a science graduate teaches science, researches into science, becomes an investment banker or goes into the law. What matters is that decision makers across the board should have a far higher level of scientific awareness than happens in the United Kingdom at present.

The difficulty is that change takes a long time to feed through. Our problems of the 1980s came about as a consequence of the education reforms in the 1960s. The remedial action that the Government have taken will not begin to be felt for many years to come.

The successful implementation of the science and technology part of the national curriculum and the extraordinary growth in the participation rate in higher education is the seed corn from which a fundamental change of attitudes in the United Kingdom will occur in the future. Correlli Barnett, in his book, "The Audit of War", highlighted the way in which the United Kingdom,

throughout the century, has become progressively committed to an anti-industrial culture. The education reforms of the past five years and the successful implementation of the national curriculum, with its emphasis on teaching science up to the age of 16, are important ingredients in changing that culture to one that is more consistent with a successful industrial and manufacturing country in the future.

The attack on the Government is misfounded. If one identifies lack of education in science and technology as one of the causes of our current problem, the efforts of the Government, in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party, to reform the curriculum so that more people learn science and technology are obviously the right steps to overcome it. Those efforts have achieved dramatic success in the 1980s.

It is equally important to realise that there is an enormous gold mine of technology and knowledge to be exploited in our institutes of higher education. Sadly, that knowledge is underutilised in comparison with Germany and Japan where the relationships between industries and universities are much closer than they are in the United Kingdom. In the 1980s the Government have addressed that problem—there has been an enormous growth in science parks. The British Technology Group's monopoly of publicly funded research has been abolished. Measures have been taken to encourage universities to develop their technology transfer and relationships with local industry.

I admit that the process of encouraging the utilisation of universities started from a low base in the 1980s, but, as the process continues, it will be of particular importance to the regions served by universities. In my region, Yorkshire, we are particularly well served by fine universities and polytechnics. An important part of the continuing development of local industry must be the ability of a region to regenerate its manufacturing base from the resources available to it from its higher education institutes.

I know that the debate is to conclude shortly, and so in summary I say that it is important to appreciate that the Government have maintained spending on science and technology throughout the 1980s in difficult circumstances and against competing priorities. They have done extraordinarily well in doing so even though many wish that more could be achieved—in time one hopes that it can. My right hon. and learned Friend has said that he will continue to set priorities and I hope that he ensures that they are established by the scientists themselves. I hope that he will defend vigorously the role of science in society and the importance of technology transfer because, throughout the next century, they must be the basis upon which our nation will prosper.

9.32 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): It would be nice if the eagerness of hon. Members on both sides of the House to speak encouraged the Government to find time, at least once every five years, for a full day's debate on science. I am afraid that that is whistling in the dark.

Hon. Members have spoken with great knowledge, concern and in all seriousness about the plight that science is now in. I accept the points that have been made about balance between the interests of the private and public sectors and their relative roles. It is singularly perverse for Britain to be cutting its basic research and undermining such advantages as it once had now that everyone, except the Government, accepts that basic research is the necessary foundation for up-to-date technology.

It is our most successful companies and industries which are most insistent that the underfunding of research councils is jeopardising the country's science base on which they depend. As that base broadens, so can the range of industries that it sustains.

On the measurement of research and development, let me try again. I am not bandying phoney price indices and I understand the problem to which the Secretary of State referred of every department creating its own price indices. I ask hon. Members to read the sources and methods of the national income accounts. It is expecting too much to ask the Secretary of State to do so, but perhaps his officials might do so.

Science is measured not in tonnes like steel but in terms of scientist hours times pay. I repeat that if scientists' pay increases by no more than the average—there is no question of special rates of pay—the so-called real measure of research and development expenditure increases proportionately to GDP. So-called level funding in real terms means an actual decline in research done in scientist man years at the rate at which real GDP grows.

It seems from what the Secretary of State said that he simply has not got his mind round the problem. Perhaps his officials will try to explain it to him. Civil research and development in the United Kingdom of 1·8 per cent. of GDP compares with 1·9 per cent. in France, 2 per cent. in the United States, 2·7 per cent. in Germany and 2·9 per cent. in Japan. We are some 50 per cent. behind Japan in civil research and development, including in the private sector.

Investment, growth, profits and the balance of payments have all suffered in both the shorter and longer terms, contributing in turn, along with the neglect of research and development, to the continued decline of Britain's industrial competitiveness. If we narrow the measures down to academic and academically related research, in an absolute quagmire of statistics the only decent estimates go back as far as 1982. They are in the studies carried out for the Advisory Board for the Research Councils by Irvine and Martin.

The most comparable countries are France and Germany. The United Kingdom spends 0·38 per cent. of GDP on academic and academically related research, compared with 0·44 per cent. in France and 0·49 per cent. in Germany. Substantial measures must be taken to raise expenditure on research in our society to the same level as that in Germany and France, not in cash terms or even cash terms per head but in research intensity.

In his approach to the science budget, the Secretary of State has turned into a blip what scientists hoped was a trend established by the real increase in the science budget in 1989. We now have a sharp cut in real terms. I am not inventing any price indices; if the Secretary of State reads the record he will find that an amendment which I tabled to an industry Bill was the origin of the autumn statement. I would not cook figures. At 1990-91 prices, as given in the autumn statement, there was a welcome if overdue and inadequate increase in the science budget of £90 million in 1989-90. I fully admit that the Government made that increase. In the Government's definition of real terms, the budget was slightly improved in 1990-91. But there is a cut in real terms in 1991-92 of £29 million.

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

The Secretary of State was disingenuous when he argued that, after cutting out capital and extraordinary items in the current year, the 1991-92 provision will preserve the real value of other items. The Secretary of State cannot suppose that there will be no capital and extraordinary items next year or in future years. He mentioned one such item in his announcement of the allocations to the research councils on 24 January. It is the construction of the clinical research laboratories for the Medical Research Council at Hammersmith. The Secretary of State cannot assume that with capital expenditure one takes it out last year but piles it in this year. That is cheating with the statistics. As we have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House, the Science and Engineering Research Council faces an immediate crisis. To keep out of the Tower of London, the council at its meeting today made sweeping cuts across all boards. It is not only the nuclear physics board that will suffer; some of the cuts will be aimed at new projects that depend on increased resources—but they go far beyond that.

When the Secretary of State and his officials have had time carefully to read the statement of the SERC they will find that, contrary to his suggestion, there is no commitment by the SERC to run the nuclear structure facility through 1992-93 or even to honour the first stage of the UK-French agreement on the Eurogam detector. The SERC has decided to look urgently for ways to do so. There are three possible ways: diverting funding from other boards that have been severely cut; diverting flexibility allowance from other research councils that have been equally severely cut; or the Government doing as they did in a similar situation a few years ago and finding additional funds to avert a crisis that they had not anticipated when they decided the size of the science budget.

I urge the Government to make an additional £5 million available this year. When the Secretary of State sees the detailed case submitted by the SERC he will have to admit that there is no other way in which nuclear research can be sustained in this country without gravely damaging other equally important areas of research. I stress that all SERC boards are suffering in the same way as the nuclear physics board.

As a well managed funding body, the Medical Research Council reviews all its research units on a five-year cycle, ending some and starting others. But this year the MRC has to make a 15 per cent. net cut in the units reviewed —all of them doing research that is vital to human health. That is not just a short-term blip. The number of actual laboratory bench research workers in the MRC has fallen from 3,974 on 1 January 1980 to 3,533 on 1 January 1991 —an 11 per cent. cut in the lifetime of the Government. The number of research grants to universities fell from 524 in 1980 to 320 in 1990, and is planned to fall further, to 250 this year—less than half the 1980 number—and to 235 next year.

The neuro-regeneration interdisciplinary research centre at Cambridge, working on Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, will not go ahead, or it will do so without a building. The diabetes centre in Newcastle will receive only a token grant. Are these the Government's priorities? Agricultural research has been cut by the Government because it too successfully increased productivity.

Faced with the justified concerns of the public and the Government about global climate change and its effects, the Natural Environment Research Council is having to use its scant resources to fill the most yawning gaps in our knowledge. British scientists—I concede the importance of recognising the continuing quality of British research—are making an outstanding contribution to the international research effort on the global environment, but on foreseen resources it will not be possible to make climate forecasts before the year 2010, in 20 years' time.

We can argue with the Government about whether we should stabilise carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000 or 2005, as the Government want, but can they seriously argue that we should wait until 2010 to forecast the effect of these emissions on the global climate? Should we make such massive resource shifts as are required to cut carbon dioxide emissions in unnecessary ignorance of their likely effects? Britain must give a lead in telescoping the necessary international efforts. We need not pay more than our share. In international science programmes generally, we pick up in work far more than we pay out. But the observation, analytical and modelling systems needed to produce global climate forecasts can and should be operational by 2000 in half the planned time.

Iso on the global environment, in the most difficult area of all, the Economic and Social Research Council had put forward a major programme on social and economic aspects of climate change. The interagency committee, gathering together all the research councils and the relevant Government Departments, is urging the importance of this field. However, the Economic and Social Research Council is able to make only a very modest start. To do that, it is having to cut drastically the quasi-executive servicing that it provides to Government Departments. That demonstrates perhaps the greatest weakness in the Government's science policy, but it is divorced from Government policy generally.

The independence and integrity of scientific research are the foundation stones on which the progress of science depends. It is a grotesque distortion to use that as an excuse for ignoring scientific advice, refusing to publish it, abusing scientists for the supposed irrelevance of their work and depriving them of the resources that they need to do their job.

The European Community research programmes and the co-ordination of our science policies with those of our European partners are of increasing importance. I wish that the House could have found time today to debate the policies that we have put forward. Those are the boost to industrial research and development; the increased incentives to the private sector to increase its effort; the diversity of sources of funding needed for basic research; the wider access by polytechnics as well as universities to research funds; the co-ordination of science policy across Departments; and the organisation of wholly independent advice to Government and to Parliament, which the Government cannot suborn, on scientific issues of major public importance.

The straits to which the Government have reduced Britain's scientific endeavour mean that the debate has had to concentrate on the immediate plight of scientific

research. I hope that the Government will think again, and think more clearly, about just what they are doing to British science and to the future of the country.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the opportunity to debate such extremely important issues as the place of scientific research in our national life, the relative responsibilities that fall to Government and the private sector, and the distribution of responsibilities in our society.

We have heard a great deal of special pleading, a certain amount of sloganising, and much discussion about the percentage of GDP which might appropriately be devoted to expenditure on science. The percentage of GDP is the latest current slogan, because it is occasionally found convenient to select statistics which seem to be helpful in supporting the case that the scientific community and those who seek to champion it naturally wish to make in support of more support for science. We all want to see such support.

It is a remarkably arbitrary measure and there is no logic or merit in selecting a particular percentage of GDP. When one looks at what takes place in different societies, one finds that widely varying percentages of GDP are applied to scientific research. The German Government spend a rather larger proportion of public money on civil research and development as a percentage of GDP, but in recent years they have been reducing that percentage. The French have been increasing it. By way of public expenditure, those countries deploy a rather larger proportion of GDP on scientific research than the United Kingdom. The USA and Japan deploy a smaller percentage, but are the most powerful economies in the world. The United States is indisputably the world's leading centre for creative research and the capacity of the Japanese for applied research and technology transfer is, as we all know, formidable.

The Government strategy has been to reduce public expenditure as a proportion of GDP for the justified reason that that way provides the opportunity to liberate resources into creative activity in the private sector, not least in support of science. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) was right to draw attention to the importance of the private sector pulling its weight and making the contribution that it ought to our science effort.

Had the Government not had that policy of redefining the respective roles of the various parties and the Government's responsibility, we should be heading towards a much smaller overall sum for creative and worthwhile scientific endeavour than otherwise would be the case. In particular, the strategic withdrawal from near-market research was self-evidently a sensible move. It cannot make sense for the Government to devote public funding to research with a foreseeable potential for commercial application at the price of supporting the basic research projects of which the Government will be the major supporter.

The strategies that we have initiated, and the policies from the DTI to promote investment and encourage industry to invest in applied research and take up its responsibility in near-market research are all the right things to have done. We created a tax regime that gives industry incentives such as the scientific research allowance, which gives 100 per cent. in the first year and makes it attractive and sensible for industry to invest in research. All that is pointing us in the right direction.

Our strategies have enabled the Government to increase their support for basic research, which is inescapably our responsibility and where we have to be the major supporter and champion. As Opposition Members know, the Government have made important real terms increases in funding for basic research of some 23 per cent. over the lifetime of the Government. As the strength of the economy developed, we saw the priority to enhance support of basic research as extremely important. Two years ago, in one year we were able to increase by 8 per cent. in real terms our support for basic research. We are now holding steady at that level and the prospect is that we shall continue to do so. I look forward to a time when the continuing development and improvement of the economy will enable us to improve that position.

I take the point made by some hon. Members about discontinuity of funding. I appreciate that planning is not easy against the background of inflation and against the imperative need to contain expenditure and to match expenditure against resources. That has not proved easy for the research councils. Some have been more successful in that task than others. However, they must accept the responsibility to live within their budgets. As has been acknowledged, part of the difficulty for the SERC in particular derives from the fact that it took a somewhat optimistic view of what might be available to it.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): The Minister knows that many hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned about the SERC. There must have been some breakdown or inadequacy in the financial control and planning to have allowed this crisis, which is none of the chairman's making, to develop so suddenly. The crisis involves more than Daresbury, although I stand second to none in my appreciation of that fine institution. It involves institutes closer to my heart in the west midlands, such as the ACME Directorate and the information technology programme. Funding for all of these will be cut so drastically that they will not be able to recover because planning will be impossible. Is there not a case for a set of measures to see us through this unfortunate development so that it can be sorted out and will not happen again?

Mr. Howarth: Once again, the Labour party is reacting to difficulties by simply saying that we should somehow conjure up more public expenditure. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) invited us to find £5 million and another hon. Member asked for £8 million. We wish to make available the best resources that we can and that is what we have done, but it would not be in the interests of British science if we were simply to make concessions and start handing out additional funding across the board. If we were to do that, we would rapidly find that our control of public finances had collapsed. The prospects then for real terms funding for science would be grave. It is indispensable to live within budgets.

Dr. Bray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No, I do not have much time.

[Mr. Howarth]

Amid all the gloom and doom and the apocalyptic visions of Labour Members, let us keep the matter in perspective. Sir Mark Richmond, in his announcement this evening, says:

"it is important to remember that the great majority of our programme remains in place. It is all of excellent quality."

I missed hearing from Opposition Members any generous appreciation of the real and major achievements of British science on which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State expounded in the earlier part of his speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) and the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) have made eloquent, lucid and strongly felt representations on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of the science that takes place near Warrington at Daresbury.

I recognise the difficulties that are faced at Daresbury. I recognise the anxieties of the scientists there not only in respect of the future of their scientific work but in terms of their job prospects and their families. That underlines the fact that it is difficult and painful to make choices, and we should pay tribute to the courage of those who are making the decisions. It is not easy to reorient a programme.

Two processes are taking place in the consideration being undertaken by the chairman and members of the Science and Engineering Research Council. They are, rightly and properly, balancing their books, and if we do not live within our means the future for science is grim. They are also, and this is at least as difficult, reconsidering priorities within their overall programme, and that must be right. Science is changing rapidly and if we are to innovate and to make room for new developments, if, very importantly, we are to create headroom for more responsive-mode grants, for more funding of new science, new creative individual scientists and small teams, from time to time changes in the existing pattern and balance of priorities have to be made. That is not easy and I recognise that the SERC has special difficulties because it has long-established considerations—a commitment to major facilities, long-term programmes and international subscriptions.

To respond again to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South about the very large proportion of SERC funding taken by CERN, we have in a determined fashion renegotiated that subscription. If my hon. Friend studies the facts he will see that the real cost of our contribution to CERN has fallen by 23 per cent. in three years. He will see that the cost of CERN is——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 254.

Division No. 60] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo

Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rigsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments)*, *and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House applauds the steps being taken by the Government to sustain and improve still further the strengths and quality of science and science education in the United Kingdom; and notes in particular the successful implementation of the science, mathematics and technology components of the National Curriculum, efforts being made to increase the number of qualified science teachers, the increase in the age participation rate in higher education over the last decade from one in eight to one in five, the significant increase in the science budget since 1979, and the allocation of funds to improve our understanding of the global environment, which provide a sound base for British scientists to play a full role with their European partners, to improve the quality of life, and to underpin the technological competitiveness of British industry.

10.15 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have just finished a debate on a very important subject, which started at 7.16 pm and ended at 10 pm. That is a total of two and three quarter hours, less a minute.

I make no complaint about the time that I was able to take, although I should have liked to speak for longer. The Front-Bench spokesmen, however, took 73 minutes to open the debate and 28 to wind it up—a total of 101 minutes in a 164-minute debate.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that you protect Back Benchers' interests ferociously. In that role, you may feel that their interests are not being served when the Front-Bench spokesmen feel it necessary to take up such an extraordinary amount of time. Will you consider persuading Front Benchers to be a little more considerate about the time they consume, especially in short debates?

Mr. Speaker: Unhappily, I have no control over the length of any speeches, except on days when I am able to ask hon. Members to speak for only 10 minutes between either 6 pm and 8 pm or 7 pm and 9 pm. Nevertheless, I agree with what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said about today's debate. A number of Back Benchers who would have liked to speak were unable to do so. If they will write to me, I shall send them the extract from *Hansard* reporting the hon. and learned Gentleman's comments.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Ann Widdecombe and Mr. David Martin be discharged from the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments and that Mr. Humfrey Malins and Sir Gerrard Neale be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

OBSTACLES TO TAKEOVERS AND COMPANY LAW

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(5) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6459/90, on obstacles to takeovers and other general bids and of the proposals described in the un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 8th March 1990 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 4th June 1990 for a Fifth Directive on public limited companies; and, while endorsing the Commission's decision to bring forward proposals to eliminate barriers to takeovers as an important step in the completion of the internal market, regrets that the overall effect of the Fifth Directive in its present form would be to create significant and undesirable burdens for business. —*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Question agreed to.

Hospice at Home Movement

Motion made, and Question proposed, That his House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): This is a welcome opportunity for me to do two things. First, I pay tribute to the men and women throughout Wales who, through their voluntary efforts, provide comfort and solace for the terminally ill: I applaud them all. Secondly, I urge the Government to recognise that more than they do now.

Facing death is the greatest trauma that we all experience. It takes great courage and strength of character, and the human spirit has tremendous reserves of both. The trauma affects not only the patient, but members of the family, and none of us responds in the same way; but the psychological effects of terminal illness are often as great as the illness itself. The level of support that is required, in both the medical and the general sense, is enormous.

The commitment shown by so many people to the terminally ill is ample testimony to the way in which society embraces those who need the service that I am describing. I am sure that every hon. Member will have seen the remarkable way in which families are enveloped by a genuine outpouring of love and affection from their friends and relatives. Without such support, many people simply would not survive the trauma.

I have witnessed at first hand the way families seek to cope with terminal illness—indeed, not only the illness itself, but impending death—and it has had a profound effect upon me. But only those who have had the experience themselves are fully qualified to speak of its effect. My own mother cared for my father for four years. He had suffered a debilitating stroke that left him paralysed on one side and caused the loss of speech. My mother saw him gradually deteriorate in health until his passing away was only a matter of time. Although he was my father, I know that the effect on my mother was considerably greater. A fairly close family friend died 12 months ago. I know the effect that the illness and death in that case had on his young wife and young family.

It is for all these reasons that, tonight, I applaud all those who work in a voluntary capacity in the hospice movement in Wales. I am associated in a very small way with the Hospice at Home movement in Gwynedd. It was set up in 1989, and to date about £140,000 has been collected. The movement hopes to be able to appoint its first nurse in the coming spring. The public response in the county has been quite magnificent, and I take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers of the appeal and those who have made contributions.

In preparation for this debate, I was in touch with a number of other hospice movements in Wales. They have all called for Government funding and support. They include the Terminal Care Fund for the Provision of Hospice Care, in South Clwyd; the George Thomas Centre for Hospice Care, in Cardiff; the St. David Foundation, in Newport; and the Ty Olwen Continuing Care Unit, in Swansea.

The need for such facilities is obvious. In 1987, 815 out of the 3,082 deaths recorded in Gwynedd were due to cancer. Regrettably, the health service is not in a position to provide full care for the terminally ill in the county. The aim of the Hospice at Home movement is to provide adequate care and support for every progressive cancer patient in Gwynedd and, therefore, for every family that has to cope with this problem. The movement tries to ensure that patients may end their days in peace and comfort, free from pain so far as possible, and usually—and, in many cases, preferably—at home.

The service hopes, when operational, to control distressing symptoms, to attempt to meet the personal and emotional needs of patients, and to provide support and help to relatives, both during the illness and into bereavement. Skilled care will be provided, in full co-operation with the health service, through the work of trained nurses and other specialised staff and volunteers.

The only national health service hospice in Wales is the Ty Olwen house in Swansea, which was built as a result of a combination of community fund raising, help from the National Society for Cancer Relief, and assistance from the West Glamorgan health authority. I am pleased to say that that hospice is about to open an extension costing £750,000, every penny of which was raised through voluntary contribution. Again I say to the members of the public in West Glamorgan what a wonderful achievement that was.

When I examined the level of Government support for the hospice movement in the United Kingdom, I found that, in previous years, money had been made available in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but not in Wales. According to Department of Health press releases, sums of £8 million and £17 million were allocated in 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively—a total of £25 million over two years. I have also had an opportunity to read the exchanges that took place in the House yesterday during Health questions, confirming that those were the figures.

It is useful to quote from the Department's press release to show the level of support that the Department feels is necessary for the hospice movement in England:

"the funds were to help health authorities move towards 'pound for pound' or 50 per cent. funding of voluntary hospice services. The commitment to move towards 'pound for pound' funding in England copies what already prevails in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is a commitment repeated by Mrs. Bottomley and by Government spokesmen in the House of Lords."

The press release goes on:

"A major reason for the £8 million allocation was surely to make hospices less dependent on charity funds, and not to maintain that charity dependency. Fund raising is an increasingly tough and competitive activity which draws greater and greater energy from senior hospice staff. The future of hospices and of hospice care cannot be secured by charity.

The Minister of State has made the critical and central point that the commitment to greater NHS funding is to allow voluntary hospices to plan with confidence and on a more stable basis. Indeed, in her written reply to Mr. Baldry of 15 December 1989, Mrs. Bottomley said that the objective of pound for pound funding for hospices would 'provide a clear basis on which to plan ahead.' This can only occur if the additional funds are used to shift the balance of hospice funding from charity and towards the NHS."

In Scotland the funding for the current year is given on the basis of 50 per cent. of the running costs of the hospice provision—in other words, pound-for-pound funding. That principle is likely to be followed in future years. So, as of tonight, we have pound-for-pound funding in Scotland and Northern Ireland and they are moving towards it in England. Thus, it was a matter of concern that we had to wait so long for an announcement in Wales. All other countries were ahead of us in funding. The

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

Under-Secretary will be aware that I and many other hon. Members have pressed the Government for action on a number of occasions.

Shortly after I became involved with the Hospice at Home movement in Gwynedd, I wrote to the then Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), on 19 February 1990, asking him when an announcement would be made. He replied on 9 March that consideration was being given to making financial assistance available. Shortly afterwards, I asked a question in the House and was given a fairly similar reply. I wrote to the present Secretary of State for Wales on 20 September, and in reply he quoted the then Under-Secretary's letter to the Hospice at Home movement in Wales stating that an announcement would be made as soon as possible.

It was therefore some relief that an announcement was made by the Secretary of State on 24 January this year. Many hon. Members are entitled to claim just a little credit for that announcement. The £1 million that was made available is to be distributed among the health authority areas in Wales. Let me make it clear to the Under-Secretary that that allocation is welcome. However, I hope that he will understand when we say that we expect that sum to be increased.

When the Under-Secretary replies, I hope that he will address his attention to the fact that there is no mention in the press release of a commitment to pound-for-pound funding for Wales. I repeat that that already exists in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and it is on the cards in England. We are entitled to ask the Under-Secretary to tell us whether it is his intention to have a similar system in Wales. The present allocation will help, but much more is needed.

I ask the Under-Secretary to tell us that we can move towards pound-for-pound funding, which, more than anything, would encourage and recognise those who are providing such a valuable service in Wales and elsewhere.

10.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on his success in securing an Adjournment debate on this important subject. I welcome the hon. Members for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) and for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), who have taken a keen interest in the subject.

The remarks of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn were given added strength and power by the fact that he was able to speak from personal family experience of the problems faced by carers in looking after the terminally ill. I share his concern and support for all that is done by people who must look after people in the last days of their lives.

I particularly appreciate the opportunity that the debate gives me to highlight the work of the hospice movement in Wales and elsewhere. I assure the hon. Member for Ynys Môn that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I, and indeed the whole Government, share his perception of how seriously it should be taken.

I deeply appreciate the high standards of care which are provided and which continue to be developed by the independent hospice movement. I welcome its growing partnership with the national health service in caring for people with terminal illnesses and in supporting their families. I expect health authorities to take the lead in planning and co-ordinating a full range of facilities for those with terminal illnesses, covering home, day and in-patient care.

It is generally accepted that most people with terminal illnesses prefer, if possible, to be cared for in their own homes and communities. Home is the best place to provide that care and support. I am delighted that the voluntary hospice movement in Wales is focusing on the development of domiciliary care and on providing the support and counselling that those with terminal illnesses and their families need.

I pay tribute to the role of NHS hospitals and in-patient hospices such as the Marie Curie centre at Holme Towers in Penarth.

Just as there needs to be a close partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors in the provision of care, there must be the fullest co-operation between everybody involved in helping those in their last days of illness. That enables people to have the full range of diagnostic and treatment facilities that are available in our hospitals. It will be of comfort because patients will not be separated from their homes, families or friends for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

The hospice movement is unique. The emphasis is on the quality of care which puts those with terminal illnesses and their families at the centre of all that is done. The hospice movement is based on a team approach in which specialist and generalist staff from a range of disciplines, often supported by volunteers, seek to give a dying person and his family the best quality of life. That is done by making available the highest possible standard of pain relief and symptom control. It ensures that people have the emotional, social and spiritual support that they need. This flexibility, time to listen and to share people's deepest needs and emotions, cannot, of necessity, always be provided in a hectic hospital ward, where the emphasis is on active treatment and cure.

One of the greatest benefits that improvements in active treatment has brought is that many cancers that used to be fatal can now be cured. Even in cases where a complete cure is not possible, patients can remain active and have fulfilling lives largely free from pain and excessive symptoms.

Advances in the treatments available have in turn made possible new patterns of care. They are based squarely on avoiding in-patient admissions, except where they are absolutely necessary.

I should like to deal with the issues that affect us in Wales and to set out how we intend to secure continued improvement in these vital services. The hospice movement aims to offer care to meet a wide range of needs. The most important area—the one for which it is justly renowned—is the care of those dying from cancer. Moreover, the hospice movement has an increasing role, for instance, in the care of people with AIDS and motor neurone disease.

Cancer alone causes about a quarter of all deaths in Wales, and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn referred to the problems that are faced in Gwynedd in that regard. In 1988 there were more than 8,500 deaths from this dreadful disease. I regret to have to tell the House that of the 30 European countries only 10 have a higher death rate from cancer for men and only three for women. I was, therefore, delighted to welcome the recent protocol for future investment which we produced on cancer services as a result of the work of the Welsh Health Planning Forum. The protocol sets out ways in which we can use the considerable resources that we devote to the treatment and support of those with cancer. The protocol emphasises the importance of hospice and domiciliary care.

We are fortunate in Wales to be able to build on the success that we have already seen in the past few years. Much of that is due to the pioneering work of Dame Cicely Saunders and her colleagues at the St. Christopher's hospice in Sydenham in London. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham can be here today because the hospice is in his constituency. Indeed, I am personally acquainted with the work of St. Christopher's, because the wife of a friend of mine was nursed there during her final days some three years ago. Dame Cicely trained at St. Josephs in Hackney where I was the Conservative candidate in 1979. I visited that hospice and saw the work done by what is the oldest of the 20th century hospices open in Britain.

By showing what can be done, this pioneering work has paved the way for important developments in Wales in the 1970s and 1980s. The Marie Curie centre in Penarth provides in-patient and out-patient care and services in the wider community. The work of the St. David's Foundation in Gwent is, rightly, well renowned. In Haverfordwest, in my constituency, the Paul Satori Foundation works ceaselessly for those approaching the end of their life through illness. The Ty Olwen unit in west Glamorgan and the Nightingale Trust in Wrexham are fine examples of NHS facilities strongly supported by voluntary effort.

More recently, the George Thomas centre has been established in Cardiff. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there could be no better person than your predecessor, a Speaker of this House, after whom to name a hospice. George Thomas, or Lord Tonypandy as he is now known, through his valiant struggle against cancer and his overcoming of it through his Christian convictions and strength of personality, has given encouragement to others who face this dreadful illness. He has given them hope that they can fight it.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn rightly drew attention to the splendid initiative of the Gwynedd Hospice at Home movement. The organisation was born some 18 months ago by a group of lay persons and professional hospital staff. They started collecting funds one year ago and I am delighted that they have so far collected £150,000. I wish them every success in their fund-raising efforts to reach their target of £500,000. They intend to set up a service caring for patients in their own homes. Nurses will run the organisation. They are to be recruited, trained and paid for by the Hospice at Home movement. The organisation will shortly recruit nurses who will be trained in November 1991 and commence caring for patients on 1 January 1992. I am sure that the Gwynedd health authority, under the excellent chairmanship of Noreen Edwards, will want to work closely with the movement to see how best to use the £65,000 which we have allocated to Gwynedd for voluntary hospice work in this coming year.

All those successful examples show the strong partnership between the voluntary agencies and statutory authorities. Among the professional staff who play such an important role in the hospice movement are the general practitioners, the social services and community health teams. That partnership has led our health authorities to provide some £250,000 annually for the voluntary hospice movement, over and above the services that they provide directly themselves.

Other important recent developments to which I should like to draw attention include the Government's decision in 1989 to end for those with terminal illnesses the six-month qualifying period before attendance allowance could be paid. That has been of significant help. In April 1990, palliative medicine had developed to such an extent that it was formally recognised as a distinctive medical specialty by Government health departments. Already in Wales, several senior house officer and registrar posts operate on a rotational basis between the Marie Curie centre at Holme Towers and the Velindre and Rookwood hospitals.

There is to be a second consultant post based at Holme Towers and funded by the Marie Curie Foundation. The second consultant will join Dr. Ilora Finlay, the consultant in palliative medicine and medical director of the Marie Curie centre. I pay special tribute to Dr. Finlay and her colleagues at the University of Wales college of medicine for their important work. They have established a postgraduate diploma course designed to share with senior and experienced GPs the best ways in which to help people with terminal illnesses. Once again the voluntary sector has played a leading role in making that possible with funding provided by the Cancer Relief MacMillan fund.

Finally, I should like to draw attention to the advice centre that the charity Tenovus has established in Cardiff to provide carers with information about available services. I should stress that the examples I have given are just a few of the considerable achievements in Wales, but I accept that much still needs to be done.

I do not dissent from the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that, perhaps in north Wales, the level and depth of service provision is not all that we would wish it to be. The Government therefore have a wide-ranging programme to secure improvements in care. The Welsh Office and the Department of Health have asked the Standing Medical Advisory Committee and the Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee to produce jointly comprehensive advice on the development of palliative care, including hospice care, in England and Wales. There will, of course, be a professional input to this from Wales. We have asked the committees to produce their advice by the end of the year.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are not waiting for the joint committee to report to ensure the continued development of services in Wales. That is why only last week my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that we would make available, for the first time, specific money for voluntary sector activity in the Principality. I am delighted to say that the £1 million allocated has been warmly welcomed. Although I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman does not think that that is enough, it is a good start and I am sure that he, too, is delighted at that allocation. We can always spend more,

[Mr. Nicholas Bennett]

but that allocation will mean a 40 per cent. increase in the amount of money available for voluntary hospices in Wales in the coming financial year. Health authorities will allocate those funds in the light of local circumstances to support existing organisations and to help foster the development of services where they are most needed.

The Welsh Office and the health authorities will review the development of those services so that, together, we can ensure the best possible care of people with a terminal illness.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about 50-50 funding and it is important that an effective working partnership is forged between district health authorities and the voluntary sector. The precise balance of funding may differ from project to project or even area to area. I do not believe that 50-50 funding of every project in the hospice movement would necessarily make the best use of available resources. Some projects may justify more support than 50 per cent. while others may need less because of their access to other sources of funding.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also decided recently to allocate £460,000 as a contribution to the continuing care unit in Pontypridd, which is also receiving funding from the Cancer Relief MacMillan fund.

Our firm intention is to provide money that can be used well throughout the health service. I am sure that the extra funding of £1 million to voluntary sector activity will be spent wisely. Therefore, in the light of progress in the coming year, future needs will be taken into account. I am delighted to offer the hon. Gentleman the assurance that that £1 million is not the only million pounds that we hope to give in future years.

We are building on success and, above all, on a practical tradition of the delivery of high-quality services. We are determined to see a humane, top-quality hospice movement that provides care and support based on a secure and dynamic partnership between health authorities and the voluntary sector.

The additional resources that we have announced represent the biggest boost ever given to the hospice movement in Wales. It will provide the basis to ensure that, at last, we can ensure that people who suffer from dreadful illnesses over a long period get the care and support they need as they approach the end of their lives. Once again, I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving the House the opportunity to talk about this important subject. I appreciate his concern and we shall ensure that his remarks are taken to heart.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Tuesday 12 February at 7 o'clock.

MIDLAND METRO BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 14 February.

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Monday 11 February.

Mr. Speaker: Bills 2 to 16 on the Order Paper all have blocking motions. With the leave of the House, I shall put them together.

AIRE AND CALDER NAVIGATION BILL *(By Order)*

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

HOOK ISLAND (POOLE BAY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL *(By Order)*

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

MIDLAND METRO (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 14 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Television (Highlands and Islands)

1. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the likely impact of the Broadcasting Act on the local television coverage of Grampian and the highlands and islands; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I am confident that the north of Scotland will in future continue to receive the same high-quality service as it currently enjoys.

Mr. Kennedy: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's recent decision to offer guarantees over three years to preserve the integrity of the present Grampian boundaries for television purposes. But is he aware of the legitimate anxiety that still exists in the north of Scotland generally—in Grampian, in the highlands and islands and the northern and western isles—that beyond that period a predatory bid—say, from central Scotland—could result in there being only one independent television company covering all of Scotland? Given the diversity of views and of regional interests across the country, that would be wholly unacceptable to north of Scotland interests.

Mr. Baker: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support for my decision. It means that in this round of bidding, the licence for the Grampian area cannot be bid for by its larger neighbour. The licence can, of course, be bid for by other groups or companies, but the television group has a restricted interest in that. After 1993, it will be possible for the smaller television companies to be bid for by their larger neighbours. Mergers or takeovers will be permitted from the end of 1992-93 at the discretion of the Independent Television Commission.

Mr. Wilson: I, too, welcome what has been done, but does the Home Secretary recognise that a new irony has been created in that, until 1993, the only companies that cannot take over Grampian or any small company are those next door to them, which arguably would be the more suitable if there had to be a takeover? It is odd that Mr. Berlusconi can take over Grampian but Scottish Television cannot. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there would be a more stable state of affairs if, once the areas for transmission had been defined and the franchises awarded for a set period, that remained the position until the next awarding of franchises and that until then any hostile takeover bid was automatically ruled out of court?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there is a moratorium. Perhaps during that period sensible mergers will come about. It has been said that some of the smaller companies might not be viable for long. That is not ruled out, but it must be at the discretion of the ITC. I

assure the hon. Gentleman and others whose constituencies are in the areas of the smaller companies that at the bidding stage and in the case of a change of ownership in the future, good regional programmes will continue to be made and shown. Section 16 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 specifically requires that. There are also requirements that regional news shall be of a high quality and that a suitable proportion of regional programmes shall continue to be made in the region.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that what matters to people in the Grampian area and in the highlands is not who owns the franchise but that, as he said, thanks to the scrutiny of the House, there is a much stronger regional requirement in the Broadcasting Act than previously was the case? People in the highlands and Grampian region can look forward to the future in the knowledge that there will have to be a properly structured regional service, whoever may own it.

Mr. Baker: I can confirm exactly what my hon. Friend said—the Broadcasting Act 1990 contains that requirement. A strength of independent television is the good quality of regional television companies. Many of them have established large production facilities and do a very good job. We wish to ensure that they continue to do so.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Although we all welcome the moratorium that the Home Secretary announced on 28 January, not least those of us who represent constituencies covered by the effective Grampian Television, what procedures will the Home Secretary bring into force to ensure that during the moratorium there will be a clear analysis of the position? It will be small compensation to have a short-term moratorium if, later, Grampian Television and other regional programmes are taken over by a predator with no interest in the area.

Mr. Baker: My powers in that sector are clearly restricted. It is now the ITC's responsibility to police the round of licence bidding and, after the moratorium, to consider whether mergers should take place. It will be bound by the provisions of the statute and will take into account the points made.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated Metropolitan police manpower in 1991-92; and what were actual numbers employed in 1978-79.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The strength of the Metropolitan police on 30 April 1979 was 22,225. The planned average strength of the Metropolitan police in 1991-92 is 28,465, giving the force over 6,000 more officers than when the Government took office.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, which shows an increase of 30 per cent. in Metropolitan police manpower. Although that is welcome, does my hon. Friend agree that the clear-up rate of crime in the Metropolitan police area is still depressingly low? Does he believe that that is because the police spend too much time dealing with minor motoring offences?

Mr. Lloyd: I hope that my hon. Friend has noticed that the clear-up rate for the serious crime of violence against the person has increased substantially and that the incidence of street violence, because of the campaign by the Met, has decreased. However, the Met is not happy with its present clear-up rate and has begun a crime investigation project, involving more manpower for the CID, improved training, better supervision and, importantly, more information and support for victims. That is a practical response to my hon. Friend's justified worry.

Mr. Malins: Does my hon. Friend agree that what gives the public confidence is not so much the number of police, but the number they see on the street? Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that he is constantly encouraging the police force in London to put more officers on the streets meeting the public?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right. The presence of police officers is encouraging to law-abiding citizens and discouraging to those who want to break the law. The Met understand that point, which we frequently make to them. There are other ways in which the police force can be effectively deployed, one of which, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), is to clear up crimes.

Mr. Sheerman: Is not the Minister dodging and weaving here? Is not it a fact that the information that we have from the Met is that, even with the 30 per cent. increase in police manpower, there are fewer policemen and women on the beat now compared with 1979? Is not that a disgrace when crime rates have been soaring and, as has been said, the best sort of crime prevention is the visibility of the police on the street? When will the Government introduce those policies in the Met, put police officers on the street and give them the backing to protect the ordinary citizen?

Mr. Lloyd: The Met certainly has the Government's backing, as can be seen by the increase in the numbers. The day-to-day deployment of forces is a matter for the Commissioner of Police. I am satisfied that he understands the necessity of having policemen on the beat. I believe that, with the increased numbers that we have provided, the number of policemen out on the streets is greater than when the Labour Government left office.

Prevention of Terrorism

3. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the workings of the Prevention of Terrorism Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The operation of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 is reviewed annually. The review of its operation in 1990 has been undertaken by Viscount Colville of Culross and his report will be published shortly.

Mr. Sims: Does not this morning's incident in Whitehall, not to mention the threats emanating from Iraq, vividly illustrate the need for the Act? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is deplorable that the Opposition, who aspire to government, have not only failed to support this legislation but consistently opposed it? Will he join me in urging them, even at this stage, to change their attitude?

Mr. Baker: The House will be aware that I am making a statement later this afternoon about the incident, so I

shall not say anything about it now. I am clear that at this moment we should not lower our defences against terrorism. I shall shortly be bringing before the House powers to renew the Act.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Secretary of State consider the introduction of a national identity card as a means of assisting in the prevention of terrorism?

Mr. Baker: That has been examined in the past and some thought has been given to having a voluntary national identity card. I can see no purpose in having such a card. This country has not had such cards, although they are common on the continent. I am not yet persuaded that that is the best way to pursue the matter. The hon. Gentleman holds up his pass. He will realise that that is not a card of identity that could be used effectively outside a narrow area, although it is important for people to have their passes when they come to the House.

Mr. Allason: Bearing in mind our experience in previous terrorist cases, where suspects have subsequently claimed that confessions have been extracted from them under duress, why do the Government object to the use of video cameras when terrorist suspects are being interviewed?

Mr. Baker: That goes very much wider than the extension of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and deals with the whole question of procedures to be followed when interviewing not only possible terrorists but other criminals. At this stage I am not prepared to make a statement on that.

Mr. Hattersley: May I put it to the Home Secretary that this is the worst possible moment for any hon. Member to attempt to drive wedges between the democratically elected parties? This is a time for a united condemnation of terrorism and to drive wedges between the democratically elected parties can only comfort the terrorists as they notice the squalid tactics of some Conservative Members.

Mr. Baker: I am sure that the whole House and the whole nation will condemn acts of terrorism. However, condemnation is not enough. We have to be prepared to take action and the Prevention of Terrorism Act gives us certain powers which I am satisfied any Government require. We will shortly bring forward proposals to extend those powers.

Border Controls

4. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about border control between Britain and other European Community countries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are continuing to take part in discussions with our Community partners about free movement of people in the light of the single European market. We have made it clear that our participation in those discussions does not in any way weaken our resolve to retain necessary frontier checks.

Mr. Knox: Why do not the Government agree to withdraw all border checks between Britain and the other Community countries? Does my hon. Friend really think that such checks fulfil any useful function?

Mr. Lloyd: We have streamlined entry for EC citizens, who pass with the minimum of delay, having demonstrated by the production of a passport or an identity card that they are EC nationals. We must certainly require continuing checks to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, other crimes and immigration by third-country nationals. We intend to keep those controls.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the Minister's positive answer, but will he support the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in resisting attempts by the Government of the Republic to remove military checkpoints, which are for the protection of people in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Lloyd: If that is the view of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I endorse it with enthusiasm.

Mr. Lawrence: Will my hon. Friend confirm that now that so many other EC countries are being threatened by massive immigration from northern Africa, they are moving towards the position that the British Government have adopted on the need for border controls?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. and learned Friend is right. There is great pressure from migration from all parts of the world into western Europe and all western European and north American countries have similar problems.

Mr. Randall: Is the Minister aware that border controls, as well as terrorism, drugs and police co-operation, are considered by the Trevi group of Ministers? Is he also aware that for a long time there has been deep concern that the Trevi group is not accountable to the House? The Labour party welcomes as a step in the right direction the Government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs on the accountability of the Trevi group, but it is disappointed that the Home Secretary did not make a statement to the House after the Trevi meeting that he attended on 22 January. Will the Minister confirm that the Government are committed in practice to making the Trevi group fully accountable to the House?

Mr. Lloyd: It is the Home Secretary who is accountable to the House, not any international grouping. That is a constitutional impossibility. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary did what his predecessors have always done: he gave a written answer to a question that was put to him to enable him to report on the outcome of the Trevi meeting. I am sure that if my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary had substantial issues to report, he would come to the House to do so in person.

Immigration

5. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to enhance the expedition with which claims to immigration rights are resolved.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The immigration and nationality department is required to meet a rising demand for its services. Every effort is being made to deal with the work expeditiously. Improvements in efficiency have been made in many areas and additional resources are being provided for the next financial year.

Mr. Viggers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the procedures involved in the cases of alleged illegal immigrants, including various forms of appeal, can mean that an alleged illegal immigrant can wait some months, or even up to a year, before a final decision is reached? As what is at issue in most cases is a matter of fact, can nothing be done to speed the process?

Mr. Baker: I am concerned about the substantial delays in the department which are growing because of the number of applications for settlement here and for entry for various purposes which involve not only adjudication but determination by tribunals. That takes a long time. It is made all the more difficult by the matters referred to briefly in the previous question. We are facing an unprecedented increase in the number of applications for political asylum in Britain which is delaying the process. I shall be coming to the House with proposals to deal with that in the near future.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Home Secretary aware that, in addition to lengthy delays between hearings and appeals, there are often administrative mix-ups, such as that involving my constituent, Mr. Mohammad Ifran? On 10 September, the Home Office was informed that his appeal had been upheld and it immediately told the entry clearance officer in Islamabad, but the papers sat on his desk for eight long weeks before he issued the entry clearance certificate. We are dealing with wives waiting on husbands and husbands waiting on wives. Eight weeks is a long time to wait after one has already waited for two years.

Mr. Baker: I will look into the case that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, although I believe that the issuing department in that instance was the Foreign Office. I hope that administrative mistakes will be avoided wherever possible, but the Croydon office has a massive amount of work. It receives 1,000 visits every day from people wanting to change the conditions of their stay in this country. That work alone—5,000 personal visits a week and many thousands of telephone calls in addition—represents a huge administrative task.

Mr. Favell: Are the British Government and the other Governments of western Europe ready for the huge wave of immigration that is bound to emanate from Russia? At present, the border between Poland and Russia is manned only by Russian border guards and there are plans to remove even them. Poland expects that millions of Russian emigrants will not remain in Poland, but will head across Europe.

Mr. Baker: There are movements of population across the world—and particularly across Europe—that we have not experienced, literally, for centuries. There is a strong movement of people from the Maghreb across the Mediterranean to southern Europe and the potential of a large movement from Russia in particular. At a conference that I attended recently, a Russian Minister said that 6 million or 7 million Russians will want to move to Europe once they get passports. He said that the Helsinki accord, with its concept of open frontiers, will allow them to do so. I pointed out to him that open frontiers allow people to move to and fro, but do not entitle them to settle in the countries to which they move. We and the rest of Europe will have to address that major problem during the next decade.

Mr. Hattersley: Although the Home Office is refusing entry applications more quickly then ever, appeals against such refusals are taking longer to process than in the past. That is often a result of the Home Office's initial statement of refusal taking six months to prepare. Can the Home Secretary do something to speed that up?

Mr. Baker: As I said, I will bring before the House proposals to deal specifically with political asylum, applications for which are currently running at several hundred a week. In addition, we have secured from the Treasury in the Public Expenditure Survey Committee settlement an additional £10 million for 1991-92 which will bring the budget for that part of the Home Office up to £108 million. That will allow for the recruitment of another 200 civil servants to deal with normal immigration work.

Mr. Janman: Does my right hon. Friend share the widespread concern among Conservative Members about the massive increase in applications for political asylum in the United Kingdom, given that the vast majority of those cases—although not all—are bogus? Does he agree that it would be useful to streamline the application procedure, so that they can be turned round much more quickly and a message sent abroad that Britain is not a soft touch?

Mr. Baker: Yes, Sir. My hon. Friend touches on an important matter. The number of applications for political asylum used to be in the region of 2,000 to 3,000 a year, but last year the figure was nearer 25,000. Although we must always provide a refuge for those who flee their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution, many who apply for political asylum are nothing more than economic migrants who would prefer to live in western Europe or in our country rather than their own. That was not the intention behind the refugee convention.

TV Licences

6. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of television licence fees for people of pensionable age.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Most pensioners pay the same as other people: £71 for a colour licence and £24 for a black and white licence. My right hon. Friend announced on 14 January that we would hold the next increase 3 per cent. below the retail prices index figure that is used to set state pensions.

Mr. Cryer: Most pensioners believe that the rules introduced in May 1988 discriminate unfairly between pensioners, most of whom enjoy nowhere near the level of income of those who receive wages and salaries. Would not it be better to sweep away the bureaucratic and nonsensical rules and introduce a standard flat fee of, say, £5? Many pensioners feel that they have been discarded and forgotten by the Government in many ways. Many of them fought for this country in the 1939-45 war and they feel that they have been very unjustly dealt with.

Mr. Lloyd: The cost of giving pensioners free television licences, or of charging them only £5, would be very large. It would need to be met by the rest of the licence payers, many of whom are much poorer than some pensioners, so that would hardly be fair. The hon. Gentleman should listen to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central

(Mr. Fisher), who speaks for the Opposition on such matters, and who suggested that any assistance to pensioners should, at the very least, be selective. That hon. Gentleman is on the right lines, but he should go further and agree that if extra resources are available, they should be directed at pensioners most in need to spend as they wish. That is what the Government did a year ago when they provided £200 million extra in the pension element of income support rates. That is the best way to help, where help is most needed.

Dame Jill Knight: Will my hon. Friend bear it in mind that if the principle is ever established that the taxpayer should pay for the pleasures of all persons over a certain age, no matter how rich the pensioner or how poor the taxpayer, we should indeed be on a slippery slope?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right. If we ever did that, we should have slipped a long way down the slope by that time.

Mr. Corbett: We know that the Government do not agree with us about exempting pensioner households from the television licence, but does the Minister acknowledge the resentment that the present concessionary scheme causes between pensioner neighbours? Is he aware, for example, that if one flat in a block of 50 is sold to someone under pensionable age, the elderly council tenants resident in the other 49 flats will lose their concession? Will he at least do something to put that right?

Mr. Lloyd: If a scheme falls within the concession, it is foolish of the council to sell one of the houses. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is the right to buy."] No, it is not the right to buy. The characteristic of such dwellings is that they are available for those over 60, and that they provide services appropriate to that age group, so the situation that the hon. Gentleman suggests does not happen. Since the new rules were introduced—after the Kirklees judgment, which obliged us to bring in a set of rules which were justifiable in court—the number of pensioners who benefit from the concession has gone up rather than down. It is about 100,000 more now than it was then, which shows that local authorities can manage to organise their housing for the elderly to take advantage of the concession.

Mr. Evennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that not all pensioners are poor and that, under this Government, pensioners are better off than they have ever been, but that they are many low-income families who feel that the television licence is unfair and should be scrapped?

Mr. Lloyd: I well understand the point that my hon. Friend makes, as does my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. That is why my right hon. Friend is requiring the BBC to make do with a licence fee increase which is less than the inflation rate at present.

Islands

7. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last visited Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man to discuss those matters for which he is responsible.

10. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last had discussions with members or officials of the Isle Of Man Government; and whether he discussed taxation matters affecting the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since assuming his present duties, my right hon. Friend has not yet had an opportunity to visit any of the islands, or to have discussions with members or officials of their Governments. I met representatives of the islands on 15 January. We did not discuss taxation matters.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister must surely be aware that the British Government have responsibility for the general good government of those islands, as well as for foreign affairs and defence. In view of the increased use of the islands for laundering drugs money and as a haven for the shadiest of financial institutions, will the Government, take a more active interest in them and exercise their responsibility for general good government?

Mr. Lloyd: In contact with the Bank of England, the islands Governments have improved their arrangements for such matters. Far from being marginal, they are extremely effective and bear comparison with our arrangements. But the islands are self-governing and have democratic Governments. That is a state of affairs with which the vast majority of the people of the islands are highly satisfied.

Mr. Holt: When my hon. Friend next talks to the Tynwald councillors, will he deal not only with taxation but with the scandal of the Isle of Man Savings Investment Bank, which has caused thousands of people in Britain, including my constituent Gwen Lamb to lose their life savings? Eight years later, the people responsible for that fraud are still walking free in the Isle of Man, and no one is doing anything about it. The Government have a moral responsibility for the legal aspects. May we look to the Government to ensure that some compensation along the lines of that made in the Barlow Clowes case is urged upon the Isle of Man so that the people affected do not have to suffer any longer?

Mr. Lloyd: As my hon. Friend probably knows, the Manx Government suggested to the Tynwald that there should be a scheme of compensation once the inspector's report was available. The Director of Public Prosecutions in this country asked that the report should not be made public until he had completed all his inquiries. I understand that he has not yet completed all his inquiries. However, I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety on the part of his constituent, so I will bring his inquiry to the attention of the Government of the Isle of Man and make sure that they are well aware of his feelings on the subject.

Prison Department Farmland

8. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total acreage of farmland in the ownership of the prison department or within its management.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): Some 8,600 acres of the prison estate are framed for production.

Mr. Field: As it is more than three and a half years since the National Audit Office published its report on the prison farms, could my right hon. Friend make a

statement to the House on what progress has been made? Is she aware that the report particularly highlighted the acceptable and unavoidable inefficiency costs of prison farms? Can she place in the Library figures for the yield per acre expressed in produce and income terms?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend will be glad to know that the survey was completed some two years ago. The net outcome was a conclusion that the prison farm service is a cost effective and good service. It is more cost effective to run the service this way rather than any other way. He will also be glad to know that some £2 million of income is generated by the farms over and above the supplies with which they support the prisons.

Mr. Tim Smith: Why does the prison department own 8,600 acres of farmland?

Mrs. Rumbold: That is a matter which my hon. Friend may contemplate by considering the history of the prison farm service. It was always considered useful for the prison department to own farmland in order to make supplies available to the prisons and to provide work for prison inmates.

Iraqi Citizens

9. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi citizens have been deported or told to leave the United Kingdom since the start of the current Gulf crisis.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: One hundred and sixty two Iraqi citizens have been served with notices of intention to deport them on the grounds of national security since 2 August 1990. Of these, three have been deported and 77 have left the United Kingdom voluntarily.

Mr. Canavan: Does the last night's welcome release of four detainees make the Home Secretary think that other people of Arab origin, including Iraqis, may be being detained and threatened with deportation when some of them have had a long-standing record of opposing Saddam Hussein's regime, even before the invasion of Kuwait? Bearing in mind the inadequacies of the existing advisory procedures through the so-called three wise men, is not there a distinct danger during a war which is supposed to be about the restoration of human rights that the British Government may deprive many innocent people of their basic human rights in a way similar to the disgraceful detention of many people in the Italian community during the last world war?

Mr. Baker: My first priority as Home Secretary must be the security and safety of the people of our country. Saddam Hussein has made a general threat of terrorism. He has subjected some of his own people to terrorist attacks, he has subjected the people of Kuwait to terrorist attacks since 2 August and he has threatened terrorist attacks across the world. In those circumstances, when I receive advice I have to act and I believe that anybody holding my office would have acted as I have done. As to the inquiry appeal procedure, the system is working and I believe that it is working correctly.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of civil rights. I appreciate that there is a tension between national security and civil liberty, but I remind the hon. Gentleman of the words uttered yesterday by Lord Justice Donaldson, the Master of the Rolls:

"The maintenance of national security underpins and is the foundation of all our civil liberties."

Mr. Dykes: Bearing in mind the enormous difficulties, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on getting the balance exactly right—obliging the serious security risks to leave the country, but maintaining human rights in the other areas where there is at least a question mark? That emphasises once again that our quarrel is exclusively with Saddam Hussein and his entourage, and not with the people of Iraq.

Mr. Baker: Yes, I would stress that very strongly. We estimate that there are about 10,000 Iraqi citizens living in this country. The great bulk of those people loathe Saddam Hussein. In fact, they fled from Iraq and would want to go back only if he ceased to govern that country. Therefore, I do not believe, as some people have impressed upon me, that there should be general rights of internment. That would not be at all appropriate. I have to act against certain people when I receive certain advice; I believe that I have acted correctly and I thank my hon. Friend for his support.

Mr. Maclennan: While recognising the paramountcy of the Home Secretary's obligation in this situation to put the security of our country first, may I ask him to take a very close personal interest in individual cases so that those who are subject to these quite extraordinary procedures may know that the facts are being properly examined at the highest level of government?

Mr. Baker: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. These matters are not taken lightly. I look at each case individually and I consider the advice that comes from various sources, including the panel of inquiry. This is a very grave and serious responsibility for anyone holding my office. One does not want people to be detained or deported unless there is good excuse.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend have any flexibility when it comes to the destination of a person being deported as having been shown to be a risk to United Kingdom national security? If no country is willing to take the deportee, can the Home Secretary give that person the option of staying in detention in the United Kingdom? Clearly, there are people who might be at risk if they were sent, say, to Jordan or Iraq and who have reason to be genuinely concerned about their own safety.

Mr. Baker: The procedure is that I issue a notice of intention to deport. The person subject to that intention has a right of appeal to the advisory panel of three. If, as a result, I confirm the intention to deport, I issue a proper deportation notice. The person concerned also has a right of appeal in respect of the destination. We are currently discussing with some people the countries to which they wish to go. Today, two have volunteered to go to different countries in the middle east.

Mr. Darling: Does the Home Secretary accept that it is the Government's primary duty to protect our citizens against Iraqis or people of other nationalities who may pose a threat to us? Does he also accept, however, that no matter what the provocation, we must set and maintain high standards? Does he agree that we would avoid the

risk of making mistakes if detainees were told what case they had to answer and were allowed representation at the tribunals? Does he accept that, notwithstanding yesterday's decisions, it is vital to avoid mistakes that would result in alienating people of good will with whom we shall have to work when the Gulf war is over?

Mr. Baker: The friend accompanying a detainee at an appeal may be a person who is legally qualified. I talked to Lord Justice Lloyd yesterday and I understand that he has spoken to the lawyers representing several of the detainees. I am satisfied that everything possible is being done, but I ask the House to appreciate that where matters of national security are concerned it is always better to be safe than sorry.

Broadcasting Standards Council

11. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the role so far of the Broadcasting Standards Council.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: There were representations from various interested parties following the council's establishment in May 1988. I have received none since it was made statutory on 1 January this year.

Mr. Hughes: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Broadcasting Standards Council on the work that it has done so far, in particular on the code of guidance that it issued just before it became a statutory body? Does my right hon. Friend share my view that families want an absolute assurance about the contents of television programmes before they turn on their television sets?

Mr. Baker: I thank my hon. Friend for his warm words about the Broadcasting Standards Council and the code of conduct that it published just before Christmas. Many people are concerned about the portrayal of sex and violence and matters involving taste and decency on television, particularly when programmes can be seen by impressionable young people. I believe that the council's work is very valuable.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with the president of the International Red Cross.

Mr. Ashby: When my right hon. Friend meets the president of the International Red Cross this evening, will he tell him of the utter revulsion that the British people feel about the treatment of prisoners of war by Saddam Hussein? Will he urge the International Red Cross to redouble its efforts to obtain from the Iraqis details of the prisoners of war and about access to them? Will he ask the Intenational Red Cross please to remind Saddam Hussein that the Iraqis cannot expect to benefit from the International Red Cross if, at the same time, Iraq refuses to honour its agreements under the Geneva convention?

Mr. Major: I shall certainly be making those points, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence did yesterday. I shall also be making it clear that in no way can Iraq's behaviour be equated with that of the allies in their treatment of prisoners of war. Iraq is in gross and flagrant violation of its obligations while the allies are doing everything possible to ensure that they meet their commitments under the Geneva convention.

Mr. Kinnock: Today's attack in Whitehall was both vicious and futile, since it will neither intimidate nor divert anyone, whether in government or opposition, in this democracy. May I express my relief at the fact that the attack caused so little harm to people, my admiration for the workers in Whitehall who continued with their duties, and my appreciation of the emergency services who responded with great speed and expertise? Today's experience further increases our fellow feeling for the people of Northern Ireland who have lived with such atrocities for nearly two decades. May I put to the Prime Minister my firm view that outrages such as the one today increase the unity and determination that we all share to defend democracy and defeat terrorism, whatever its source.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I know that he shares my contempt for terrorism, which he has just expressed again most eloquently. It is clear from the timing of this morning's attack that it was a deliberate attempt both to kill the Cabinet and to do damage to our democratic system of government. It failed. In no circumstances could it possibly have succeeded. Many people in this country, including most noticeably those many brave people in Northern Ireland, have been the victims of terrorist attacks on many occasions. None of those attacks succeeded in changing the policy of successive Governments, nor the policies or principles of this House in any single iota—nor will they. The IRA's record is one of deep failure in every respect. That failure was demonstrated yet again today. It is about time the IRA learned that democracies cannot be intimidated by terrorism and we rightly treat it with contempt.

Sir Bernard Braine: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that in the present exceptionally cold weather, which is forecast to increase in intensity, some of our fellow citizens, especially the elderly and the infirm, may suffer grievously? Is it possible for my right hon. Friend to consider ways and means of providing extra help for such people?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security met my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary this morning to discuss the particular problems caused by the wholly exceptional weather. Severe weather payments have already been triggered in half the country and that may be extended. Our primary concern now is to ensure that vulnerable groups keep warm. Therefore, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing later today that the seven-day qualifying period will be waived in view of the exceptionally severe weather. Therefore, people should keep warm—secure in the knowledge that payment will be

made to those eligible even if, as forecast, the cold weather lasts only a few days. Payment will also be made at the enhanced rate of £6 per week to reflect higher fuel charges.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister pass on our best wishes to those who were injured in this morning's outrage? Does he realise that the whole House and, I believe, the whole nation will back him in his determination to ensure that government continues as usual, despite this morning's outrage? Does he agree that the operation of an open democracy necessarily carries with it some risks and that the proper response to terrorism is to do as he has done and make it clear that we will not be deflected in our policies or weakened in our determination to preserve the open and accessible character of our democracy?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the right hon. Gentleman speaks for the whole House in what he has said. Our determination to beat terrorism cannot be defeated by terrorism. I hope that that is fully understood everywhere. I shall be happy to pass on the right hon. Gentleman's best wishes to those who were injured and also his congratulations and those of the Leader of the Opposition to those many people from the emergency services who helped this morning.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the people of Northern Ireland fully support what the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition has said today? Will he also accept that they congratulate the Prime Minister and his colleagues on their escape today? Will he bear it in mind that those of us who represent Northern Ireland in the House often face difficulties when murders and atrocities take place in Northern Ireland and we cannot have the time of the House to bring them to hon. Members' attention as has occurred today? Will the Prime Minister consult the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and consider whether immediate action can be taken to ensure that the fair employment legislation is not used against workers supporting the war in the Gulf?

The Prime Minister: The whole House recognises that, alas, Northern Ireland has had far too much experience of the sort of attack that we have seen today in London. The hon. Gentleman will know of the firm opposition of the Government and their prececessors to that sort of attack in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Further to his reply to the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), when the Prime Minister meets the president of the International Red Cross, will he confirm that while we insist that Iraq accepts its responsibilities, we will also accept our responsibilities with regard to others who are suffering because of our allies' failure to accept the International Red Cross and the Geneva convention? Will he tell the president that he will re-affirm that commitment to the Israeli Government in relation to their treatment of the Palestinians on the west bank and in Gaza?

The Prime Minister: All allies in this conflict are following the Geneva convention to the letter. That is, has been and will continue to be the case.

Q2. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Townsend: In view of my right hon. Friend's great concern for the plight of Terry Waite and the other British hostages in Beirut, will he give serious consideration to sending a senior emissary to Tehran and Damascus—taking advantage of our restored diplomatic relations—and to Beirut to learn at first hand what more the British Government can do to obtain the hostages' long-overdue release?

The Prime Minister: We remain very concerned about the plight of Mr. Waite, Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Mann and about the effect on their families of their long imprisonment. We already have representatives in Teheran, Damascus and Beirut and they are devoting a great deal of effort to securing the release of our hostages. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Syrian Foreign Minister Ash-Shara' yesterday and made it clear yet again that Syria will do all that it can to secure their release.

Q3. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Heal: I welcome the Prime Minister's statement about the cold weather payments. As one who knows well the weaknesses of that system, why does he not use the power that he has to abandon the scheme altogether and look for a general uprating of pensions for all people all the time?

The Prime Minister: In making that point, the hon. Lady wholly forgets the changes that have been made to the payments available. She has perhaps also overlooked the fact that severe weather payments did not exist at all when last there was a Labour Government.

Mr. Stanbrook: In view of my right hon. Friend's welcome words about the people of Northern Ireland, do not they now deserve a promise that they will never be removed from the protection of the British Crown?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, they have that certainty without their express wish to be otherwise.

Q4. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Prime Minister recall that on 8 November last year, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer introducing his autumn statement, he said that for this financial year there would be a budget surplus of £3 billion? Is he aware that many Ministers are saying that that £3 billion surplus has disappeared? If such a gross miscalculation had been made by a Labour local authority, it would have been subjected to poll tax capping and surcharge. What does the Prime Minister intend to do —sack his Chancellor?

The Prime Minister: As to the fiscal position, that will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget. As to the accuracy of forecasts, far be it from

me to recall unhappy memories for the hon. Gentleman, but there were occasions when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) was out by several hundred per cent. in his fiscal forecasts.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will the Prime Minister congratulate those of our allies such as Turkey, and other nations that have fundamentalist Muslim insurrectionists and great difficulty maintaining political stability, on the brave moves that they have made in furthering the allied cause in the Gulf?

The Prime Minister: I am entirely happy to do that. My hon. Friend expresses the point most eloquently.

Q5. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: May I share with the Prime Minister a problem that I have?

Hon. Members: "No."

Mr. Speaker: Order. Provided that it is a question.

Mr. Banks: It is not that sort of problem, anyway. A small gent came into my constituency office on Monday and said, "Why is it that in Britain we have the highest inflation rate, the highest interest rates and the highest balance of payments deficit in the European Economic Community?" He asked whether these were the problems of success or an indication that the economy was in deep doo-doo. I said that I had not the faintest idea, but that the next time I saw the Prime Minister I would ask him. So what is it—economic success or deep doo-doo?

The Prime Minister: It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has not the faintest idea, for his facts are wrong.

Q6. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: Following the previous point, does my right hon. Friend agree that the stability of sterling against the deutschmark, despite the recent rise in German interest rates, shows increasing confidence in the Government's determination to bring down inflation within the exchange rate discipline? Is not that the best framework for a lasting and sustained reduction in interest rates, with the removal of the premium required for holders of sterling in terms of interest rates against other currencies? Is not that better for British industry than the cut-and-run tactics practised by the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: The stability certainly reflects, to some extent, our membership of the exchange rate mechanism, which is in no sense a straitjacket. If the pound were falling, we should not be able to cut interest rates whether we were in or out of the exchange rate mechanism. In due course, the stability that the mechanism provides will help and not hinder. The opportunity will come as our inflation rate falls.

Q7. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: The husband of a constituent of mine unfortunately died in the Gulf a few months ago. As a result, my constituent and her daughter lost their home in Germany and require to be rehoused by the local council, which has not been able to rehouse them. If that is an indication of the way in which the Army treats widows, will local authorities be able to cope in those circumstances?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Army will always look at these matters sympathetically. If the hon. Gentleman will provide me with the details of the case, of which I had no prior knowledge, I shall be happy to examine it for him.

Terrorist Incident (Whitehall)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about events in Whitehall earlier today.

Shortly after 10 am, a white Transit van was driven up and left on the corner of Whitehall and Horse Guards avenue. At about 10.8 am, three mortars were fired from the vehicle, either by remote control or with a timing device, in the direction of Downing street. One of the mortars landed in the back garden of No. 10 Downing street and exploded. The other two landed on Mountbatten green, behind the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. One exploded but the other failed to do so, disgorging its contents on the green.

One official and one police officer were injured. We believe that their injuries were not serious; a number of other people may have had minor injuries. I am sure that the whole House will want to convey its sympathy to those people. It is indeed fortunate that there were no worse injuries. Several windows at the back of No. 10 were shattered, but no structural damage is apparent.

The police and emergency services arrived rapidly on the scene. The whole area was cordoned off and explosives officers searched the scene for further devices. The whole House will wish to thank the police and emergency services for their immediate response and for the skill and courage they showed.

This reckless attack appears to have been the work of the Provisional IRA. Mortar attacks, sadly, are not unknown in Northern Ireland, but this is the first time that terrorists have attempted such an attack on the mainland of Britain. The terrorists constantly change their methods of attack in an attempt to catch us off our guard. We must be on our guard at all times against attacks from a variety of sources.

The Government have a range of contingency plans against the terrorist threat and counter-measures are kept under constant review. We are urgently assessing the significance of this morning's attack and its implications for security. We will be looking again at the physical security of the whole Westminster and Whitehall area. It must be made as safe as humanly possible for all those who live or work in the area, as well as for the millions who visit or travel through it.

We must take all reasonable security measures. That means continuing police efforts and public vigilance in support of them. But there is a limit to the sort of defensive measures that can be taken. In a democracy, people wish to be free to go about their business. To disrupt their lives any more than we need to would be a concession to terrorism.

This attack bears all the hallmarks of the violence perpetrated by the Provisional IRA, who have killed so many people and caused so much injury and suffering in Northern Ireland, on the continent of Europe and on the mainland of Great Britain. We must be thankful that, in this instance, the terrorists were unsuccessful.

The whole House and the whole country will utterly condemn this deliberate and ruthless attempt to injure or to kill members of the Government, officials and, indeed, anyone else who might have been in the vicinity of such a reckless and cowardly attack. The House will need no reminding that many visitors, families and children visit Downing street and it was only by chance that no group was there today.

The House will want to be reassured that the Cabinet met to conduct its business as usual. The machinery of government and our democratic process were not, and will not be, disrupted by terrorist attacks. Today, terrorists have attempted to strike at the heart of our Government: they have failed.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I begin by joining the Home Secretary in his condemnation of the act of terrorism that took place this morning? We express our profound relief that no one was killed, and offer our sympathy to the police officer and to the member of the Downing street staff who were injured and to those members of the public who, the Home Secretary tells us, suffered minor injuries as a result of what happened.

May I also express our admiration and gratitude to those members of the police, of the fire brigade and of the ambulance services who, as always on these occasions, did their duty at considerable risk to themselves?

May I support the Home Secretary in his insistence that neither the business of government nor the processes of Parliament can be disrupted by this attack or by such attacks? May I make it clear that we believe that an attack on the democratically elected Government of this country is an attack on democracy itself?

May I finally, and most importantly, reiterate the determination of the Opposition that terrorism of all sorts will be defeated? The perpetrators of today's attack can gain nothing and will gain nothing from what they did. We look forward to their speedy capture and to the conviction of all those who were in any way responsible.

Mr. Baker: I am grateful for the words of the right hon. Gentleman and I am sure that the whole House is united on this. As he rightly said, attacks of this sort are an attack on our democratic process. Terrorists, to whichever terrorist group they belong, are not interested in democratic processes; they just want to destroy the democratic process. May I also thank the Leader of the Opposition personally for his words on the 1 o'clock news? On these matters, nothing divides us.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Is the Home Secretary aware that the IRA maintains very close liaison with other terrorist groupings throughout the world, including Arab terrorists? Does he accept that this latest dastardly attack, which will not deter either the Government or the people of the United Kingdom, may be another form of proxy, this time on behalf of Iraq? The IRA will be hoping to obtain money and guns from that country.

Mr. Baker: The IRA has in the past certainly derived a great deal of help from the Libyan Government. However, I must say to my hon. Friend that I have no special reason to connect this morning's IRA attack with the activities of any other terrorist group.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The right hon. Gentleman's statement rightly ended with an assurance that the democratic process would not be disrupted by terrorism. Does he share my deep regret that we have not yet seen the restoration to Northern Ireland of the democracy that was removed 18 years ago, at the behest of terrorists?

DAMAGED ORIGINAL

Mr. Baker: Of course I am aware of what the right hon. Gentleman has said. Talks are continuing at present to try to make some movement in the Province. The people he represents and the people of Northern Ireland generally have been subjected to considerable violence over the past 20 years or so. It is violence perpetrated by terrorists—principally by the IRA, but by others as well. We must defeat them there, just as we must defeat them in Great Britain.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): May I add to the expressions of relief about the fact that, happily, nobody was injured in this dastardly attack, my congratulations and those of all Conservative Members to my right hon. Friend and to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the typically robust and courageous way in which they responded this afternoon? I hope that the Home Secretary agrees that although such an attack may win publicity for the IRA, it can do nothing but strengthen public support for Government policy.

Mr. Baker: I am sure that my right hon. Friend speaks for the whole House in that and not just for Conservative Members. We must make it clear that these attacks do not break the resolve of the Government to continue governing—that is what terrorists always want to do. They have made a dramatic attack, but it has not succeeded; it has failed. That is the important message which must go out.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Is the Home Secretary aware that I completely accept his view that terrorists will always break through even the best security arrangements and that this morning, judging from his report to the House, the emergency services, as ever, did well?

As he is the police authority for the Metropolitan police—this does not apply to any other part of the country—and with his complete responsibility, whose head will the right hon. Gentleman cause to roll for allowing the failure of security? In our main road near Parliament, a vehicle was parked for eight minutes. If anybody else tried to park there, he would be stopped. Something went wrong. Will the Home Secretary look into that?

Mr. Baker: I am surprised that such comments should be made by a right hon. Member who has held my office. The incident will be looked into. I have spoken to the Commissioner, who is having a meeting with the commissioners. One cannot fault the police security. Police security has been stepped up in the Westminster and Whitehall area, but I ask the House to appreciate that it is difficult to deflect or stop an incident of this sort, involving a van stopping casually for a few minutes. Such an incident has not happened on our island before. We must examine it very seriously indeed to see what lessons we can learn from it.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this would be a wholly appropriate moment, with the aim of strengthening the common cause against terrorism, for the Opposition to change their policy and now to support the prevention of terrorism Act?

Mr. Baker: As I made clear at Question Time this afternoon, I shall be bringing forward proposals in the next few weeks to extend that Act for a further year. We cannot lower our defences at all. The Act has worked, and is working, effectively. When it comes before the House, it will be for Opposition Members to decide their response to it. I hope that they may this time find it in their hearts to support it.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept from my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself our sense of relief at the failure of this spectacular and cowardly attack? But does he agree that many in the House and throughout the country at this time feel great solidarity with the people of Northern Ireland, who have had to suffer similar attacks but with less spectacular accompaniments?

Mr. Baker: I have considerable sympathy with the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, because this is the first time that there has been a mortar bomb attack on the mainland of Great Britain, although, alas, such attacks are not unknown in Northern Ireland. In 1989 in Northern Ireland, there were 15 attacks involving a total of 81 bombs, of which 38 exploded and the rest were neutralised. We must do everything we can to discourage that form of terrorist activity on the mainland.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Will the Home Secretary, in his review of this incident, check that a proper balance is being struck between closing off the whole of Whitehall while investigations necessarily take place and the need to return to normality as rapidly as possible? If it is business as usual for the Cabinet and Question Time in this House, which we wish to maintain, it should be business as usual for the public and the movement of the public as quickly as can be obtained.

Mr. Baker: The police do not wish to inconvenience the public any more than is absolutely necessary. It is an operational decision by the police, which I have discussed with them, that that part of Whitehall should still be cordoned off. They want to make absolutely certain that there are no further explosive devices. Indeed, the police would be failing in their duty if they did not do that. But my hon. Friend is right to say that, when faced with terrorism of this sort, a balance in a democracy must be struck between allowing people to go about their business as normally as they can and at the same time providing proper security. I believe that it would be a concession to terrorism to try to make the whole of central London a cordon sanitaire.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Is the Home Secretary aware that "Sky News" this morning ran a story that an eye witness, a doctor, saw two bodies in the van, and that that report was later carried by a London Broadcasting news programme? Are we to take it, since the right hon. Gentleman did not refer to it in his statement, that the story was bogus, or is confirmation of the report still awaited?

Mr. Baker: I cannot be responsible for what is said on "Sky News". I was aware of the report, and other reports concerning the event are being looked into by the police.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): I was at the Scottish Office when the attack occurred. The white van was parked at the front and the mortars landed at the back. We were not allowed out of the building at the front or the back. I wish, in praising the police and others who

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came to our assistance, to praise the staff at the Scottish Office. They were cool, calm, totally controlled and cheerful, and showed great courage in a difficult situation.

Mr. Baker: The staff in the Scottish Office, the Cabinet Office and No. 10 were restricted to that area because there was a possibility of devices going off, both at the back of No. 10 and Whitehall. It takes some time to determine the position and there is always the possibility of a second vehicle in such attacks, so one must be certain before allowing people to move. I agree with my hon. Friend that the staff in all those offices have behaved well.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): What is the hard evidence, other than the method of operation, that points to the IRA as the perpetrators of this outrage?

Mr. Baker: The source of my advice, from people who have dealt with such matters, is that the incident bears the hallmarks of a Provisional IRA operation because of the type of vehicle used, and the fact that the roof was cut away and there was a delivery platform fixed in the van. Such incidents are not unknown in Northern Ireland and the incident bears the hallmarks of an IRA attack.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the advisability of increasing the military presence in Whitehall above the tourist attraction of the Household Cavalry will at least be considered in the security review that he announced in his statement? Does he agree that the criticism of our right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) when the gates were erected at the entrance to Downing street now looks incredibly silly?

Mr. Baker: I will certainly draw the first point to the attention of the Commissioner. As I have said, a balance must be struck as to the extent of the security measures. I am certain that the gates at No. 10 were necessary and that they act as a positive discouragement to frontal attacks through Downing street.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): I met Mr. Ahmad Omar Amesh, the head of the Libyan interest section, this morning. The Libyan Government condemn the terrorist outrage. However, Libya also condemns the state terrorism applied to Iraq. It condemns the saturation bombing of innocent people who have no quarrel with us——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a bit wide of the the statement.

Mr. Brown: There is no evidence of any link with Libya. Clearly, it is easy for the media to make all sorts of snide remarks, invent stories and create the hysteria that, somehow, in some foreign country in the middle east——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that is enough, Ron.

Mr. Brown: There is conjecture, and stories—— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman can speak for which country he wishes. As he will soon no longer be speaking for the people of Scotland, he will have plenty of time to do so.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet had a narrow escape from a carefully planned attack? Is not it appropriate to thank God for their safety?

Mr. Baker: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend said. There is no doubt that the attack was aimed to injure or kill Government Members and officials working at the heart of government. It is fortunate that the mortars did not explode on the building itself. I very much share my hon. Friend's views.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The whole House is obviously united in the belief that democracy will never be threatened or intimidated by mindless acts of terrorism on the streets of London. At present, cuts have either taken place or are being considered for both the London ambulance service and the London fire brigade. Given the tension that exists in London now, will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to look at both those emergency services to ensure that they are adequate to meet all the challenges they might have to face?

Mr. Baker: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government are providing a substantial national increase next year in the amount spent upon the security forces. Certain councils and authorities may decide to make other changes, but the Government give high priority to supporting the forces of law and order. Since we have been in power, we have substantially increased the size of the police force by about 25,000. We have also substantially increased the capital spent on the fire service and the other emergency services. We shall continue to do so.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call two more hon. Members and then we must move on.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, in a terrorist war, each one of us is directly or indirectly involved? As the terrorist has to exist among us, we all can and must play a part through a much higher sense of vigilance. Does he believe that in this respect the media can play an extremely valuable educational role?

Mr. Baker: Yes, I agree with both my hon. Friend's points. Today's events remind all people in our country, from wherever they come, that they must be more vigilant about possible terrorist attacks, because such attacks may come from sources other than the IRA.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is my right hon. Friend fully satisfied that the powers and penalties available to the Crown to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of terrorism and the penalties that we hope will deter would-be perpetrators of terrorism are appropriate? Is not it the case that what occurred this morning was virtually a treasonable act, in that the terrorists launched an attack against this country's elected Cabinet at a time when this country is in a state of undeclared war but real conflict against Iraq?

Mr. Baker: Every effort will be made to detect and arrest the perpetrators of this incident. We have had some success in the past few months in detecting, arresting and convicting terrorists. Following the discovery of the arms cache in Pembrokeshire in 1989, two men were arrested, convicted of explosive offences in December last year, and

each sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment. On 2 October, the Wiltshire police arrested two men at Stonehenge, and they have been charged with conspiracy to murder Sir Charles Tidbury. In addition, other terrorists, or people who are alleged to be terrorists, have been arrested and will face trial. That shows that we have made some headway in the past few months in detecting and arresting terrorists.

Business of the House

3.52 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*

TUESDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the British Technology Group Bill

Committee and remaining stages of the Namibia Bill *[Lords]*

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on a motion to approve the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement.

Motion on the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order.

THURSDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (6th allotted day). Until about seven o'clock, there will be a debate entitled "The Crisis in Farming". Afterwards, there will be a debate entitled "The Crisis in Fishing".

Both debates will arise on Opposition motions in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

FRIDAY 15 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 18 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Maintenance Enforcement Bill *[Lords]*.

Committee and remaining stages of the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Can we have some clarification from the Leader of the House about the severe weather payments changes that were announced in a most unsatisfactory way through a planted question to the Prime Minister this afternoon? On a matter of this importance, which the Opposition have repeatedly been drawing to the Government's attention, we need a proper statement from a Minister to which we can properly respond. It is not good enough, when the whole country has known perfectly well that we were heading for a period of severe weather, for the problem to be dealt with by means of crisis meetings between Ministers. We want a proper statement and a proper review of the system.

While the Government are about it, how about having a Minister from the Department of Energy at the Dispatch Box next week to explain to us that if only the energy conservation programme of the last Labour Government had remained in operation, some 6 million homes that are not insulated would now be properly insulated? Let us have an apology from a Minister on that.

Why are we having only a half-day debate on Tuesday on the British Technology Group Bill? The Government's privatisation schemes have repeatedly ripped off the taxpayer over the past 12 years. Surely we owe it to taxpayers to spend more than half a day explaining why their assets are being sold against their will.

As I or my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) have repeatedly asked the Leader of the House for a debate on the Cullen report on the Piper Alpha disaster, I raise the matter again with some

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desperation. The Leader of the House has repeatedly said that we do not have time for such a debate. Will he now give us a specific time and date when that important matter can be debated?

Mr. MacGregor: In the light of the recent severe weather and this morning's meeting to discuss what further steps could be taken—I am talking about further steps, because the Government have taken many steps in relation to the position of the elderly and the disabled in cold weather—it was right that the House should be informed of any decision as early as possible.

Moreover, if the hon. Gentleman regards the announcement as important, as I do, he will agree that it was right to give it full prominence during Prime Minister's Questions, which many people will have been able to see on television. The hon. Gentleman will also know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has always taken a close interest in the matter. He was a Minister at the Department of Social Security and I was Chief Secretary when this policy was first developed. Many members of the Government have taken an interest in this matter. Therefore, the steps taken today are entirely right.

I will pass on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy the hon. Gentleman's request about energy conservation. However, I do not think that there will be an opportunity to debate the matter next week.

The successive steps that we have taken on privatisation, of which the British Technology Group Bill is only one of many, have been extremely popular and we shall see clearly in the vote next week that this measure, too, has the support of the House. The business for next week has already been agreed, but I shall consider through the usual channels the hon. Member's point about time.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the Cullen report, which I recognise is an important issue. We clearly have a lot of legislative business to get through next week, but I shall bear the hon. Gentleman's point in mind, because I am keen for the House to debate the report as soon as possible.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a busy day ahead of us, and the purpose of business questions is to ask the Leader of the House about the business statement that he has announced today, not to dwell upon more general matters.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): In case my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and other Ministers have reached the conclusion that all their hon. Friends agree with the proposition put forward in an early-day motion signed by some 70 of our colleagues to the effect that the financing of education should be transferred to the Exchequer, may I remind him that it continues to be the aspiration of Ministers to reduce income tax to 20p in the pound and that, in advance of any conclusions being reached on the review of the community charge, there is a strong argument in favour of having a separate debate on the whole question of the financing of education?

Mr. MacGregor: I note what my hon. Friend says. He will know that I have taken a close interest in the matter and shall continue to do so, but I do not think that such a debate is likely to arise next week.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Hon. Members in all parts of the House would welcome the opportunity to debate farming and fishing next week. Will the Government's statement on the hill farming review have been given by the time of that debate?

If there is to be a statement on cold weather payments to supplement the Prime Minister's welcome comments today, could it make it clear whether payments will take into account the wind chill factor? A TV weather forecast shows that, although the temperature in my constituency is minus 2 deg C which would not trigger a cold weather payment, the wind chill temperature is minus 5 deg C, which would.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman's second point concerns policy, rather than the business of the House, but I will bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

I agree that it will be useful to debate farming. Major issues confront us in the Community and in the GATT Uruguay round. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will speak in next week's debate and welcomes the opportunity that it will provide to indicate the Government's position. We are making a robust defence in the European Community against those elements of the Commission's thinking that are clearly discriminatory and which go in the wrong direction. I cannot at this stage say whether my right hon. Friend will be able to make a statement about the hill livestock compensatory allowance, but I know that he will do what he can in that respect.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): On the resettlement grant review initiated by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House agreed to refer that matter to the Top Salaries Review Board. When it reports, will my right hon. Friend undertake to lay the necessary regulations before the House at the earliest possible moment?

Mr. MacGregor: I have published in *Hansard*, as part of a written answer, the TSRB's revised terms of reference that resulted from last week's debate. I cannot guarantee what the Government will do with the board's report, but I certainly want the House to have an opportunity to debate it.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is like being a member of a club, without the supper.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member was the final questioner last week, so I am calling him earlier this week.

Mr. Skinner: That is fair. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate next week on water privatisation and the massive increases that are burgeoning from water authorities? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Severn-Trent water authority, which covers my region and many others in the north, has announced a price increase of 15·2 per cent., which it claims conforms with Government guidelines? If that is true, it is high time that the Government defended their record.

Mr. MacGregor: Water authorities are engaging in massive capital expenditure over the next 10 years to deal with environmental considerations, among other things. I

recall the hon. Gentleman emphasising the need for such action. That is one reason for any increase. Nevertheless, there will be no opportunity next week for a debate on that issue.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 394, which is in the names of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and others.

[That this House notes the increasing numbers of complaints which are being received by right honourable and honourable Members from constituents who are rightly concerned by the approach taken by the BBC and ITV companies to the reporting of events in the Gulf; regrets that at times this reporting has been irresponsible, tedious and obsessive; and believes that the continual promotion of criticism of the international coalition's policy and military strategy provides succour to Saddam Hussein.]

Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the disgraceful reporting from Iran by ITV? It claims to be censored news, but ITV is showing the news that is not censored. The news from Iraq that is censored is not shown. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the broadcasting of black propaganda of that kind is distinctly unhelpful during a very difficult period?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that there is concern about that issue, among not only right hon. and hon. Members but the general public. The BBC and ITN have issued guidelines to their staff on the reporting of events in the Gulf. Perhaps that issue should fall within consideration of what kind of debates and statements on the Gulf the House should have. There is general agreement that there should be a reason for them. Nevertheless, I am sure that my hon. Friend will have other opportunities to express his views, which I hope have been noted today.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Could we have a statement next week on the process of negotiations on the multi-fibre arrangement in the general agreement on tariffs and trade? As the Leader of the House knows, it is an important set of talks. The textile industry is suffering under high interest rates, jobs are being lost, there is short-time working and there is a great deal of uncertainty which needs clarification to give confidence to the industry. At the moment, the talks are concentrating on agriculture, but we should have a report on what is happening as soon as possible so that the House can be kept up to date, for the sake of the textile industry, which in Bradford alone directly employs nearly 14,000 people.

Mr. MacGregor: Without getting into details of the negotiations, the hon. Gentleman will know that discussions are going on, with a view to restarting formal negotiations as soon as possible, and that Ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council earlier this week have instructed the Commission to pursue whatever action is needed, both multilaterally and bilaterally, to achieve agreement. We obviously regretted the suspension of negotiations in December. The multi-fibre arrangement, will run out at the end of this year unless agreement is reached in the GATT round. It is premature to have discussion, a debate or a statement on that aspect until we are clearer how the informal discussions are going.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Could we have an early debate on the subject of Opposition day debates? Although we ought to be very grateful to the Opposition for their choice of subject yesterday—science and science education—which allowed us to draw attention to the Government's excellent record in these matters, unfortunately only five or six Opposition Back Benchers attended. Surely that is unsatisfactory.

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps that was because many Opposition Back Benchers recognise the Government's excellent record on science education. That is really a matter for the Opposition.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will have heard the statements and the repetition during the Home Office statement. Therefore, bearing in mind the old saying, "The empire strikes back"—we cannot say that any longer, but the nation might strike back—could the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland make a statement next week on the principle of restoring local and parliamentary democracy to Northern Ireland? Bearing in mind that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said 18 years ago that Stormont was suspended to stop violence, and that six years ago the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed to stop terrorism, is not it time that parliamentary democracy was restored to Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, as the hon. Gentleman knows, engages in prolonged discussions on these matters. It was right to make a statement today, because of a specific and unprecedented event.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): As it is some while since the House debated the vexed issue of Sunday trading, could we debate it before long? The law is clearly in a mess, but equally, many people, especially those in Croydon and south London, which is a busy area, while recognising that the law needs to be changed, seek some restriction on Sunday trading, so as to maintain a little peace and quiet in a residential area. Could that subject be brought before the House quite soon, because it is important?

Mr. MacGregor: I recognise what my hon. Friend says about the law being a mess. Equally, he will know that there is a variety of views on how that mess should be put right. In view of that, it is unlikely within the near future —I suspect, longer than the near future—that we shall devote a great deal of time to that issue on the Floor of the House with a view to specific action.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Could the Leader of the House make some provision for the House to debate London next week? Is he aware that the population of Wales is about 3 million, but there is a Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and a Welsh Question Time, and that the population of Scotland is around 5 million, but there is a Scottish Question Time? However, London, which has a population as large as those two put together, has absolutely nothing. Since the Government robbed London of its elected government, things have gone from bad to worse in the capital and we have absolutely no forum to debate such matters. Will he please do something to remedy that?

Mr. MacGregor: It is equally the case that there are substantial populations in large areas of the shire counties

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of England, but we have no specific Question Time for them. We have certainly had a great deal of debate about London issues in the House in recent years and there has been a general welcome for the abolition of the Greater London council. I cannot promise a debate on that subject next week.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will the Leader of the House make a statement next week on the future of the European Standing Committees, bearing in mind the off-hand, casual and perhaps contemptuous way in which they have been treated? Is he aware that, while one Committee spent three hours at its first sitting agreeing unanimously to an amendment to motion No. 2 on today's Order Paper, the amendment has not even been printed? Is he aware that, at the second sitting, we were invited to discuss a motion opposing a measure which the Government had agreed to without discussion two days earlier? Is he aware that we found out that a report from the Treasury Solicitor which we had requested was published two days after the Committee had discussed it? In view of all those matters, would it not be better for the Leader of the House to make a statement, rather than go through what is simply a farce and a fraud?

Mr. MacGregor: I absolutely reject the suggestion that the Committee has been treated in an off-hand manner. A great deal of time was spent on developing a new way of dealing with European Commission documents. It is important to recall that one of the reasons for so doing —and the reason why many hon. Members accepted the new Committees—was the need to ease the pressures on the House and reduce the number of occasions on which it sits for long hours after 10 pm. There was a lot of pressure on me to deal with that issue. It was one factor which we took into account when considering new methods of dealing with EC documents.

I remind my hon. Friend that when one embarks on a process with some novel aspects, one naturally wishes to review its progress. Naturally some problems may arise. I said clearly that I wished to have a proper review by the end of the summer. It is possible that certain items may arise that require that the review should take place sooner. However, we should not base our decision on just two days of sittings of the Standing Committee. We should take a little more time to see whether some aspects need to be reconsidered, which is inevitable in a new experiment.

On my hon. Friend's specific point about the motion on the Order Paper today, one learns quickly from such matters. It would be right to put on the Order Paper the motion as amended by the Committee. Therefore, the Government will not seek to move that motion this evening.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Leader of the House aware that, by failing to provide the House of Commons with an opportunity next week to debate the war in the Gulf, he is doing two things? First, he is preventing us from discussing the mass carpet bombing of Iraq, some of which is taking place from British bases. The United States former Attorney-General Ramsey Clark confirmed today that the bombing caused massive destruction in Basra and Baghdad.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman is preventing a debate on the 40,000 British ground forces in the Gulf, who are apparently about to be committed to a massive land battle in which great numbers of casualties may occur. Has the Leader of the House noticed that, in *The Guardian* this morning, an opinion poll showed that over a quarter of the population—more than 10 million people —are opposed to the war?

In wartime, this House must have the opportunity to hear the views of those who represent people in Fairford, those in the armed forces and, indeed, those who have an interest in a peaceful settlement of the hideous tragedy which is unfolding. Apparently the Government do not intend that Parliament should discuss it at all next week.

Mr. MacGregor: As I have often made clear, I review all the time, in consultation with my right hon. Friends, through the usual channels and through listening to the House, whether there is a need for a debate or further statement on events in the Gulf. It is important that issues that require it are brought to the House. The right hon. Gentleman will know that we have done so on a considerable number of occasions since the hostilities began. I do not anticipate announcing a statement today. If there is a requirement for an emergency debate on the Gulf, we can consider it immediately at the time.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): As my right hon. Friend is a strong supporter of open government, and presumably of open opposition, may I persuade him to find some parliamentary time to debate the activities of a new secret society known as the "supper club"? Is he aware that the club apparently consists of Opposition Members who wish to meet and eat in secret to debate ways of undermining the policies of the Leader of the Opposition, for which they have voted? Could my right hon. Friend arrange by some method to have those riveting debates in the Chamber?

Mr. MacGregor: I was considering whether there is an opportunity to raise the matter next week. I cannot see one immediately, but I am sure that the ingenuity of my hon. Friend and others will ensure that the matter is raised somehow.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I must declare an interest: I am not a member of the supper club or of any other club. I know that that will come as a shock to the House.

I should like to take the Leader of the House back to the answer that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) a few moments ago. Carnage is taking place in the Gulf. There have been thousands of civilian casualties in Iraq; members of the armed forces on both sides are dying; environmental destruction is taking place; and there is enormous opposition throughout the Arab world, throughout Europe and throughout the United States to this war.

Does not the Leader of the House think that it is high time for a debate, in which all those issues, as well as the loss of liberties in this country through censorship and what I believe to be internment, could be discussed? We ought to be discussing how a peaceful political solution to the problems of the region might be found—and we ought to do so before any more people die, any more destruction takes place, or any more money is wasted on this appalling and, I believe, immoral war.

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said, we have already provided a great deal of time for both debates and

statements on these matters. We recently had two very clear votes in support of the Government's aims and actions. Those votes left no doubt about the general feeling in the House. However, I repeat that I shall continue to consider whether, at any time, the House should be given a further opportunity, through either a statement or a debate, to discuss the situation.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): The Leader of the House will remember that, in the interests of the people of London, we abolished the Greater London council and the Inner London education authority. That has proved to be very successful. Does my right hon. Friend know that it is now the policy of Her Majesty's Opposition to bring back the GLC and the Inner London education authority? Will he undertake to provide Government time for a debate on this important development?

Mr. MacGregor: As we have a fairly crowded programme of legislation and other matters, I do not think that there will be an opportunity for such a debate for some time.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on a recent Civil Aviation Authority report, which says that the radar system at Glasgow airport is out of date? Does the Leader of the House know that there was a near miss over Glasgow? Had a collision occurred, there would have been an absolute catastrophe. We need a statement to clarify the problem.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that there will be a statement, but I shall discuss his point with my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Bearing in mind the fact that nearly 80 of my hon. Friends have now added their names to early-day motion 396, may I support the request for an early debate on education finance and local government, so that the true advantages of this scheme may be properly debated and misunderstandings cleared up?

[That this House believes that, following the Government's education reforms, particularly the move towards local management and the introduction of grant maintained schools, there is now a compelling case for education funds to be provided directly from central government.]

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of my hon. Friend's very great interest in these matters, as he and I have often discussed them. I have no doubt that he will find many opportunities, in addition to the early-day motion, to state his views. In reply to his request for a debate, I have to say that, under the current review of the community charge, the options for funding local services are being considered. It would be premature to speculate on the conclusions of that review and it would therefore be premature to have a debate at this stage.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Does the Leader of the House know how disappointing is his statement that we may not have an early debate, in Government time, on the crisis in the textile industry? That crisis covers much more than the breakdown in the GATT negotiations. Has the Leader of the House seen the press release issued by Mr. Allan Nightingale, the executive chairman of the Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance which makes it clear that, unless there is a reduction in interest rates and an improvement in the exchange rate in the very near future, the textile industry, which employs 480,000 people, will go to the wall completely?

Mr. MacGregor: There was a debate before Christmas in which textile matters were raised. We have also held a number of economic and industrial debates. I have already made the position clear in relation to the GATT Uruguay round. The hon. Gentleman referred to economic issues and the exchange rate. I draw his attention to the fact that there is to be a debate on the economy next Wednesday.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): In the light of the continuing unrest and conflict in the Baltic states and in other republics of the Soviet Union, and given the growing concern that certain elements of the armed forces in the Soviet Union may have deliberately reneged on the conventional and even the strategic arms agreements, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important for the House to have an early opportunity to debate such important matters, which affect the security of the west?

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly understand the great importance of my hon. Friend's points and I shall bear them in mind.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Leader of the House aware of the strength of feeling in fishing communities about the statutory instrument that imposes an eight-day continuous tie-up? Given that their main opposition relates to safety—that lives could be endangered by the terms of the statutory instrument—will the Leader of the House undertake to ensure that an early debate on that statutory instrument takes place on the Floor of the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that there will be an opportunity to debate all those matters next week.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): My right hon. Friend knows that, under the provisions of the Security Service Act 1989, the security service commissioner is required, within 12 months of the Act being passed, to supply an annual report to the House. It was due on 18 December 1990, but it has still not been published. I am very surprised that it is not to be debated next week. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance to the House that the report will be published as quickly as possible under the terms of the Act?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall look into my hon. Friend's point and write to him.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement next week, in which he can either confirm or deny that he has issued directions to health authorities to postpone operations that require long-stay treatment in hospital until after the Gulf war? I have received complaints from two constituents. One requires a hip replacement and the other a knee operation. They have been told by the Woodlands hospital in Bradford that they cannot have the operations they need until after the Gulf war.

Many people believe and argue that beds and wards that have been closed temporarily and permanently should

[Mr. Max Madden]

be reopened so that Gulf casualties can be treated in them, and constituents such as mine can have the operations that they urgently need. Will the Leader of the House take urgent steps to ensure that constituents know whether their operations will have to be postponed and can also be confident that Gulf casualties will be treated properly?

Mr. MacGregor: The Government have already made it clear that the national health service should get sufficient notice of casualties to enable hospitals to cope without having to empty beds in advance. The Government are meeting the full cost to the NHS of Gulf casualties. Therefore, health authorities will be able to use all their normal allocations for their normal work load. There should be no break in non-Gulf emergency work. I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health the specific cases that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): While our thoughts are rightly concentrated on the Gulf—my right hon. Friend has said that there will be statements, as necessary, about the Gulf war—will he also remember that events in other parts of the world cause great concern to right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House? My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) referred to the Baltic states. May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to two other areas? Yugoslavia's problems may lead to instability in central and southern Europe because of the disunity of the Government in that country. There has been a total collapse of government in Somalia. Understandably, that matter concerns many of our constituents.

Mr. MacGregor: I accept my hon. Friend's point. However, there have been statements and debates on issues affecting other parts of the world. That was the case fairly recently with Somalia. I am aware of these concerns, but it is a question of how much time we can devote to them when there are so many other problems to address.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): The Leader of the House will be aware of early-day motion 433 concerning Lewis's stores and the 6,500 jobs at stake in many cities of our country.

[That this House regrets that Lewis's the department store group, went into receivership on Thursday 31st January; notes that over 6,500 jobs are at stake in areas of high unemployment like Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Stoke, Leeds and Leicester; and requests the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to have urgent talks with the Chairman of NatWest Bank in order to provide a life-line whilst the search for a suitable buyer continues.]

Will he ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to have urgent talks with the chairman of NatWest bank to see whether a lifeline can be thrown to them? Will he also tell his right hon. Friend that high interest charges are the cause of many problems, particularly in the north-west of England where companies are going to the wall?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall have to look at the early-day motion to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I have heard what he said and will look into it. I cannot make any promises about debates, but some of the economic matters could have been addressed in recent debates and they can be mentioned in the debate on Wednesday.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House been able to persuade the Secretary of State for the Environment to make an oral statement on the privatisation of the transport section of the Crown Suppliers, in the light of early-day motion 364, which is in my name, and which deals with the activities and irregularities of Mr. Bill Pinkney, the chap who is supposed to be buying the transport section?

[That this House notes a series of parliamentary replies from the Parliamentary Secretary, Department of the Environment, dated 24th January relating to the sale of Crown Suppliers transport section and investigations into the activities of civil servant Mr. Bill Pinkney the prospective buyer; notes the evasive nature of the Ministerial reply, Official Report, column 27, which refers to 'the Crown Suppliers following up the matters arising from that audit'; notes that under the general heading of 'Disciplinary matters', the Crown Suppliers after a full investigation in 1990 did find that the level of Mr. Pinkney's behaviour fell below the level which was expected of an official; notes that the investigation found overpayments, dubious entries, unauthorised payments and a failure to declare a conflict of interest with a company called Turnbulls; notes that the Chief Executive of Crown Suppliers did consider formal charges but decided not to proceed with them as Ministers did not wish to prejudice the sale of the transport section to Mr. Bill Pinkney and his associates; notes that attempts by senior civil servants under instruction from Ministers to hide away the nature of irregularities and disciplinary offences were orchestrated so as to avoid embarrassment to the Government; questions the role of Shandwick, the public relations company, in preparing grossly misleading press releases relating to the sell off to a so-called management buy-out which is not a buy-out at all but an offer funded by a North of England second hand car dealer; and unreservedly condemns Ministers for their shameful actions.]

Can the right hon. Gentleman assure me that that man, together with others, will not be allowed to purchase that organisation? He is not a fit and proper person to have that right.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman raised this matter last week and I have nothing to add to the fairly long reply that I gave him then.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Many people at this time find it unacceptable that the United Nations Security Council is not in permanent session to discuss the Gulf war. Given that, for the first time in the history of this nation, the Government cited a higher authority—the United Nations—in the issue of whether to go to war, will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement next week on why the proposition from the five Maghreb countries and India was refused? Will the Leader of the House urge his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to ensure that the United Nations is in permanent session to discuss this matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made clear the position in relation to statements and debates in the House on the

Gulf. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's specific points to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate next week to discuss councillors' allowances and expenses? I raise this because Councillor Bill Axon, a regional councillor in Midlothian, has been accused by the media of coming to London for a hymn service and misusing public funds and so on. Whatever the merits or otherwise of his argument, as I understand it he was here for a good reason.

I speak as an ex-regional councillor and I feel, on behalf of colleagues elsewhere, that there should be a proper way of funding visits to London by members of a local authority. Let us discuss this next week and ensure that people on local authorities are paid properly, so that the media cannot use stories such as that to which I have referred simply to attack visits that have been entered into for good reasons.

Mr. MacGregor: I know nothing of this case, but, bearing in mind the wide and important matters that hon. Members have been raising with me which I am not able to accommodate next week, I see no possibility of a debate on that matter.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Leader of the House ensure that, during next week's welcome debate on farming, his robust friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food makes a statement on the condition of the knackery industry? Unless some urgent action is taken to help that industry, much of it will go into liquidation and thousands of sheep and cattle carcases will be left littering the countryside of Scotland, Wales and England, resulting in danger from diseases such as anthrax and others. It is a grave crisis. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that there is a statement next week?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand the importance of the matter raised by the hon. Gentleman. Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Minister will have many issues to address in his speech, but I shall ensure that the Minister who replies to the debate is aware that the hon. Gentleman is likely to raise this matter.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will the Leader of the House try to find time next week for the House to discuss the Prime Minister's rather misleading reply in respect of cold weather payments? The Prime Minister stated accurately that there were no severe weather payments under the Labour Government. There were not, but there were exceptional needs payments and also an electricity discount scheme, which were far more generous than the cheeseparing scheme that the Government currently operate. While the Prime Minister did not lie to the House, he misled the House. It would be helpful to have a debate to clear the matter up.

Mr. MacGregor: It is important to recognise that the Government have introduced not just cold weather payments but other schemes, such as expenditure on heating additions under supplementary benefit, which have since been incorporated in the income support rates. In relation to the elderly and the disabled, undoubtedly a great deal more expenditure is undertaken by the Government in addition to cold weather payments. I think that that was the point which my right hon. Friend was hammering home.

Orders of the Day

Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Although I would never question your judgment, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to look again at the non-selection of new clauses 3 and 5. I do not think that the Social Security Act 1990 was taken into consideration. In that Act provisions were slipped in which were not debated because of the guillotine but which debarred hundreds of thousands of industrially deaf people from being able to claim compensation. New clauses 3 and 5 were intended to put that right. I hope that consideration can be given to those people who, not because of sleight of hand but because of that addition to the 1990 Act, were debarred from claiming justifiable compensation.

Mr. Speaker: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's point, but this is a very narrow Bill. Having considered carefully new clauses 3 and 5, I regret that I had to come to the conclusion that they were beyond the scope of this Bill.

Ordered,

That the Bill be considered in the following order: new Clauses, new Schedules, Clauses 1 to 4, Schedule 1, Schedule 2, Clauses 5 to 7, Schedule 3, Clauses 8 to 10, Schedule 4, Clauses 11 to 15.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

New Clause 1

PAYMENTS FROM THE INDEPENDENT LIVING FUND

'.—(1) Recipients of the highest rate of the care component oif the disability living allowance shall be entitled to a community care supplement payable out of the National Insurance Fund.

(2) The weekly rate of the community care supplement shall depend on the individual circumstance of a severely disabled person. In particular it shall depend on the extent to which he is severely restricted in his ability to perform normal personal care and domestic tasks because of his disablement, on the extent of his need for help, attention or supervision from another person, on the cost of securing the required help, attention or supervision, and on such factors as the Secretary of State may prescribe.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (1) above—

(i) a community care supplement shall not be payable in addition to a payment from the Independent Living Fund;

(ii) providing his circumstances qualify him for a payment from the Independent Living Fund, a community care supplement shall be payable to a severely disabled person in lieu of such a payment when the payment ceases on the expiry of the life of the Independent Living Fund Trust on or before 8th June 1993; and

(iii) payment of the community care supplement shall be disregarded for the purposes of assessing housing benefit and community charge benefit.'.—*[Mr. Hannam.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.32 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I and other members of the all-party disablement group tabled the new clause to open up the debate on community care payments to enable severely disabled people to remain living in the community in their own homes. The new clause seeks to end the uncertainty about the future of the independent living fund, to fulfil the general desire to bring the payments more into line with social security disability benefits and to enable us to talk about meeting the crucial need for an alternative means of helping severely disabled people when independent living fund payments cease in 1993.

A theme running through several of the debates today will be the extra cost facing severely disabled people and the need to ensure that the costs are properly provided for in the benefit system. When the social security benefit reforms went through in 1986 and the system of additional cost payments was abolished, a worrying gap opened which threatened the community care programme as it affected severely disabled people. That is why the independent living fund was created and why it is vital that the uncertainty surrounding its future should be removed.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on managing to secure £62 million this year for the independent living fund. The fund is highly successful in enabling severely disabled people to live independently in the community. It is an innovation, providing money directly to disabled people to enable them to buy in their own personal care and assistance services and to have maximum personal control over their living arrangements. Such a system, on a statutory basis, is central to any philosophy of independent living. Similar systems exist in Scandanavia. The basic philosophy of individual control over care arrangements is working well for many disabled people because of the money that they are receiving from the fund. Local authorities never have been, and never will be, able to provide that flexibility.

The fund helps more than 6,000 severely disabled people. The average payment is about £74 a week, and the highest payment is up to £400 a week. The trust deeds come to an end in April 1993, when the Government propose simply to transfer the fund to local authorities.

It is important to remind the House how the fund came into existence. During the passage of the Social Security Act 1986, much concern was expressed by disability organisations and by Members of all parties about the loss of additional requirements payments, in particular the domestic assistance allowance. At the 11th hour, the Government responded to our concern by setting up the independent living fund. I feel an awful sense of déjà vu, because April 1993 is approaching but no new arrangements are being made for severely disabled people. There will be an 11th hour panic as 6,000 severely disabled people, who currently receive payments from the fund, begin to make urgent representations to their Members of Parliament. I remind hon. Members that that figure represents about 10 for each constituency.

In Committee, the Minister said:

"It is inconceivable that on one day in April 1993 the whole of its case load will move over to the local authorities."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 11 December 1990; c. 63.]

I strongly urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to assure the House that he will seriously consider setting up the ILF on a statutory basis. It would be stupid to have another panic such as we had in April 1988.

I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister to recommendations 11 and 12 in the ninth report of the Select Committee on Social Services, entitled "Social Security for Disabled People." It states:

> "We continue to regard the ILF as an innovation that has enabled some disabled people to make community care work well . . . We further believe that the Government should consider the establishment of the Independent Living Fund as a statutory body."

Those comments carry weight and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who is a member of that Select Committee, would like to add his comments.

In a sense, the fund has been a victim of its own success. The enforced restriction of the fund to disabled people in receipt of the higher rate attendance allowance and who are aged between 16 and 74 has meant that potential applicants have been losing out and there has been a drop in new applicants to the fund.

In Committee, the Minister responded by stating that he envisaged that the local authorities would undertake the vast majority of cases after 1993. I point out to the House that the supposedly watertight statutory duties to assess and meet the needs of disabled people may come under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and section 4 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 imposes no stronger statutory duties than are contained in section 2.

From our long experience of working with disabled people and their organisations, we know that local authorities fulfil only statutory duties. I cannot realistically envisage that one day in April 1993 all local authorities will suddenly, magically, assess and provide individually tailored packages of care for severely disabled people in the way that payments from the ILF do. Most fundamentally, the ILF gives disabled people control over their own care arrangements, arranging care at the times when they need it, not at the times that the local authority is able to provide it. I must point out that usually they are unable to provide that care after the hours of darkness, when extra care and help often is needed.

I should be most reluctant to see the flexibility that is now in place disappear. Unless there is clear action and commitment from the Government to place the ILF on a statutory basis, one day in April 1993, 6,000 severely disabled people will begin to lose their payments from the fund.

In Committee, my right hon. Friend the Minister acknowledged the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), which I reiterate. Local authorities often have differing and competing priorities. If money is simply transferred to local authorities, what guarantee will there be that it will not disappear into child protection, into road mending or into other priorities? We recently heard of one authority that is sacking five occupational therapists so that it can afford to meet its responsibilities under the Children Act 1989. I should like to place it on record that I oppose the transfer of the fund to local authorities because there is no evidence that they will be able to provide the high level of support that the fund now provides so successfully and because it will be perfectly legal for local authorities to divert the resources intended by central Government for disabled people into completely unrelated areas.

When we press for change to social security Bills, we are often told, "It is a matter of resources." All political parties recognise that disabled people and carers need more resources and that this cannot be achieved overnight. However, the argument is different with the independent living fund because the money has already been allowed for in the budget. Disabled people will lose out if the fund is stopped. I know some disabled people who are terrified about what could happen in 1993. They have tasted independent living and enjoyed a basic human right that we all take for granted. They are fearful at the prospect of being forced into institutional care and now face two years of uncertainty.

I will give an example. Before the introduction of the fund, James, who is paralysed from the neck down, received all his care from his mother aged 82. He now receives a large payment from the fund which enables him to live independently, but what will his future be? For other disabled people, the fund allows payment for much-needed respite. One parent received a payment from the fund which enabled her to buy in two hours of care a week which allowed her a break from caring for her severely mentally handicapped daughter. Uncertainty about the future payments from the fund is causing disruption because disabled people cannot make long-term care arrangements as they cannot rely on those payments continuing.

The Government rightly promote community care. The fund enables many disabled people to make a reality of that care. Does not my right hon. Friend the Minister agree that it is absurd to propose to wind up the fund that enables severely disabled people to live independently? I urge the Government to follow the recommendation of the former Select Committee on Social Services to place the fund on a statutory basis. This group of severely disabled people must be provided for. They cannot face institutional care. The Government recognised that and provided for it in 1988 and that provision must continue. There must be no question of existing beneficiaries losing out.

I look forward to a positive response from my right hon. Friend. At this stage, I hope for a reassurance at the very least that existing beneficiaries will continue to receive payments. The Minister is familiar with the work of the all-party disablement group and its continued representation on issues such as the mobility allowance and benefit for deaf students. In both cases, the Minister responded positively.

The issue of the ILF will not go away. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will receive representations from hon. Members of all parties when their constituents begin to face uncertainty. If some of that uncertainty can be lifted, we shall be happy to let members of our all-party group in another place pursue the nuts and bolts of a proper arrangement.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I am pleased to speak from the Dispatch Box for the first time on this important and serious matter, and especially to support the all-party disablement group, its many eminent members who are here today, and their new clause, which follows that moved by my right hon. Friend the Member

[Mr. Graham Allen]

for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). He has done more than hold my hand over the past few days while I have been working my way into this complex Bill.

I know of the interest of the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) in this issue and I concur with many of his remarks. He rightly said that the new clause would put the independent living fund on a statutory basis and, above all, safeguard the payments from that fund which are currently made to severely disabled people. Sadly, the new clause is necessary because the Government appear confused and uncertain about the future of the ILF.

4.45 pm

We all know that the deeds that created the charity—the ILF—expire on 8 June 1993. If the new clause does nothing else, I hope that it will smoke out the Government and give them the opportunity to make clear the future of the ILF and, above all, the future of those people who desperately need it or whatever takes its place. We hope that the Government will take this opportunity today.

There is great strength of feeling behind the new clause which is shown both by the fact that it is tabled by the all-party disablement group and by the presence of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) and other members of the former Select Committee on Social Services who propose that the ILF should be placed on a statutory basis. I hope that the Government will listen to the bodies that speak for disabled people, to parties of all complexions and to Parliament itself which found its voice through the former Social Services Select Committee.

The fund was set up to rectify the mistakes caused by the recklessness of the Social Security Act 1986, which left many severely disabled people as losers under what was then the new income support scheme. The ILF was not a spontaneous act of generosity by the Government. It was an attempt to make good some of the damage that they wrought in their social security expenditure changes in 1986 which were implemented in 1988. Having removed an essential provision, the Government rightly sought to put that right, at least in part.

The philosophical problem facing the Government is that they appear to regard severely disabled people as a public expenditure problem. The issue will not go away. Severely disabled people will not be reshuffled and will not disappear because of the 1986 Act, the ILF, a fancy agency or whatever takes the place of the ILF. A new answer must be devised which commands all-party support, which will stick and which will be for the benefit of severely disabled people.

The latest Government wheeze is to shuffle this "problem" over to local authorities under the community care policy and to hive off responsibility ever further until they can say, "This is somebody else's baby. It is not our responsibility." Whatever institutional rearrangement the Government come up with, the demand of severely disabled people for basic assistance to meet their obvious fundamental right to live independently as far as possible will reassert itself. The Government must understand that that fundamental need will not be organised away.

The ILF started with £5 million a year. As the hon. Member for Exeter said, next year it will have £62 million. Even that figure entails rejecting nearly three quarters of the applications received and restricing the original criteria to those who are over 16 or under 74 years old. Anyone who is not on the higher-rate attendance allowance is also disqualified.

As the hon. Member for Exeter said, the ILF is threatened by its very success. That underlines the need for the fund or a successor body. Who knows what is the unmet demand from among the 6,000 disabled people in the United Kingdom? The answer to that frightens the Government and motivates their search for someone—anyone but the Government—to administer a scheme such as this. In Committee, the Minister said:

"After 1993, the generality of cases should go to local authorities. There will obviously be a need for some interim arrangement to deal with the existing load of the ILF . . . There will have to be some transitional provision and there may be some provision for new cases. I am not able to go much further than that today".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 11 December 1990; c. 63.]

In the two months that have elapsed since the Minister said that, perhaps he has had a chance to think about what will happen next for those with severe disability. I invite him to tell the House those thoughts.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I shall be brief, being aware of the desire of hon. Members to make progress due to circumstances outside the House.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. This is a good subject on which to make one's first appearance there because the issue rightly produces harmony across the Floor of the House. I am pleased that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) referred to the report of the Social Services Committee, and, as it is clear that hon. Members present today have read it, I need say little about it.

Attention was drawn to our second recommendation in the part of the report dealing with the independent living fund, which was to put it on a permanent basis. I need not rehearse the arguments, but I draw attention to our other recommendation, which was based on this quotation from the chairman of the trustees of the fund, the admirable Mrs. Winifred Tumim:

"We would agree that there is an enormous amount, a huge amount, of unmet need and a vast amount of misery which is not being attended to. As trustees, obviously, we cannot do more than administer the resources in the most equitable way we can."

All who have been involved over the years with the severely disabled know that what Mrs. Tumim said is true, so it was not surprising that our first recommendation under that part of the report stated:

"We recommend that the Independent Living Fund be provided with additional resources specifically to collect more detailed information about the characteristics of applications to and awards from the Fund, and that the Government should use this information to help plan the development of social security benefits for disabled people."

That is a reasonable recommendation. We are concerned with an evolving scene. Other reports have produced more information, and it is clear that we do not know it all. Anyone who thinks that it is a static situation and who suggests that we need only upgrade for inflation does not understand the scale of the issue with which we are trying to deal. I hope that the Minister will respond to both recommendations, which appear to command the support of the majority of the House.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I was sorry to miss the opening speech of the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam), who has done much work on behalf of the

independent living fund. The new clause is about a small group of special people who are particularly and severely disabled. Their struggle is unbelievable—in many ways, beyond the imagination of many of us.

Hon. Members will recall the contribution of Mary Greaves, the director of the Disablement Income Group. She told me that it took hours for her to prepare simply to go out to a meeting—to get dressed, bathed, leave home and get into the car—activities that we perform easily when we come to the House. As I say, the effort required by them is extraordinary and is unimaginable by able-bodied people. We should keep people such as Mary Greaves in mind as we decide whether to accept this new clause.

The Minister should remember that, by agreeing to the new clause, he would help not only the disabled but himself, because he knows, being a statistician, that he will, as a Minister, have to find much more to keep them in institutions rather than it would cost to allow them their independence.

Local authorities are not the appropriate organisations to provide the type of provision that is given by the independent living fund. Indeed, they are the last bodies to wish to undertake the task, because local authorities always provide funds for popular causes. The severely disabled are not a popular cause in that sense. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will accept the common sense embodied in the new clause, which would then clearly be approved by the House.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I too support the new clause, and I apologise to the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) for missing his speech. I was caught by the starting gun in dashing through the snow to get here. I also welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) and congratulate him on his initial performance at the Dispatch Box. I hope that it was the first of many, and I am sure that we shall co-operate on cross-party lines on other issues such as that being discussed today.

The Minister heard many of the arguments in Committee and I shall not rehearse them again. I believe that in his heart he has sympathy with the direction in which we wish to go. I hope on a day such as this, when we are reminded of the importance of making provision for disabled people, that the Minister will meet the points embodied in the new clause.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I too hope that the Minister will find a way to accept the new clause. I do not agree with the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) that the people we are referring to are not a popular group. Although small in number, they comprise an important group who elicit public support well beyond their numbers.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I welcome the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) to the Dispatch Box—in taking part in a debate rather than asking questions—and wish him well. No man who could remove Gary Sobers twice in a fortnight from the wicket can be bereft of a certain quality. I congratulate him on that and on his succession to the Opposition Front Bench. Although in the summer we played in the same team together, whereas now we are condemned to be on opposing sides, I hope that the spirit that was engendered on those earlier occasions will pervade our discussions.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that in no sense do I regard the troubles of, or individuals who suffer from, severe disability as a problem. Our job, as the Government and as a legislature, is to see this as an opportunity to enable disabled people to enjoy a quality of life that has been denied their predecessors and many of them.

Much has happened. I will not go over the ground that I have covered on other occasions in saying why I believe that the next 10 years will be important in terms of improving the quality of life and accessibility of disabled people to opportunities in employment, leisure and independent living that the rest of us can take for granted.

I am anxious to play my part to the greatest possible extent in bringing that about, and I know, because of the all-party Select Committee, on which the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) play an important part, that, when hon. Members discuss these issues, they do not discuss them on a partisan basis. We want genuinely to help people with disabilities. Perhaps I run some gentle danger elsewhere in Government if I say that I welcome the pressure that I am frequently put under by hon. Members in urging me to do still better.

We are discussing, in particular, the independent living fund. I take a personal interest, and some satisfaction, in the way in which the ILF has developed and expanded. I recall approaching the present Prime Minister when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury to persuade him to produce £5 million for the fund, whereas the budget this year is £62 million. It has been a great success, not least because it has identified a real need in the community and gives disabled people the chance to exercise control over the provision made for them. It ensures that they are not simply told that somebody can come at a particular time of day that suits the timetable of the social services department. Instead, choice can be exercised about the nature and extent of the care that they are given.

I should like to underline the compliment paid by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) to Mrs. Tumim and the other trustees of the independent living fund. I doubt whether any of them realised the extent of the work that they were undertaking when they took on the responsibility. They have carried out that work with sympathy, flexibility and imagination. I congratulate the chairman and, although it is invidious to pick out a single trustee, make a special mention of Pauline Thompson of the Disablement Income Group, who has played a most constructive role in the affairs of the independent living fund since its introduction.

5 pm

I recognise that the new clause is a device to obtain assurances about the long-term future of the independent living fund, but I am bound to say a word or two about the merits of the new clause. The most satisfactory way forward is not to put it on a statutory, regulated basis. By 1993-94, we expect that the adjudication officers in our Department will be making about 20,000 decisions a week on disability living allowance. They will thus have to be very much concerned with the regulations for that benefit.

One of the most important parts of the magic of the ILF is that trained social workers make individual visits, go in some depth into the needs of disabled people and come up

with a package to meet those needs. However worthy our staff are in the Department of Social Security, because of the pressure under which they are working, I doubt whether they could provide such attention and sympathy to the needs of individual disabled people in the same way as the ILF provides at present.

I understand the concern of the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South and of other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate about the ability of local authorities to pick up those cases. I reiterate that, as the ILF has been running in recent years, I have been worried about the number of local authorities that have, in essence, been passing on cases to the ILF that should properly have been the responsibility of local authority social services departments. It has been an easy option for them to take when there are other priorities competing for their budgets.

I stand by what I said in Committee, that I believe that the vast majority of cases that, at present, are the responsibility——

Mr. Ashley: If the Minister feels unable to accept the new clause, will he give strong guidance on the fund to local authorities?

Mr. Scott: We still have two years before it is contemplated that the Griffths proposals on community care will be introduced. The vast majority of cases presently being handled by the independent living fund should then be able to be handled by local authorities. I shall draw the attention of my ministerial colleagues to the right hon. Gentleman's point about the need for guidance when that change is made, so that local authorities are conscious of their responsibilities.

The words that I used in Committee were carefully chosen. Although I take seriously the points that have been made today about the future position of people currently being helped by the ILF and understand anxieties—many people have communicated them directly to me—now I can say only that we wish to look most closely at the proposed arrangements that will come into effect in 1993, the timetable for the transfer of cases and any transitional arrangements necessary. Without wishing to sound arrogant, I hope that, given my track record of launching the ILF and seeing its successful expansion, hon. Members will accept my assurance that I wish to be satisfied about the practical effects of the arrangements.

Mr. Allen: Although I accept that the Minister cannot give a firm date or set of organisational arrangements today, will he offer some encouragement by saying when he will make announcements so that hon. Members and people who work for disabled groups can make representations to him and work towards that proposed date?

Mr. Scott: That is difficult, because of the natural decision-making processes in Government. There must be discussion and, apart from the purse strings aspect, the arrangements will involve local government, which is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I want to announce, as soon as possible, the arrangements that will come into effect after 1993, not least because I know of the anxieties that many people on the ILF are feeling, and I do not wish unduly to delay that process.

Mr. Hannam: I wish to deal more with the present than the future. My right hon. Friend is aware of the problems caused by the restricted criteria presently applied to the ILF, especially the upper age limit. I understand that the trustees were looking at the restrictive criteria. Does my right hon. Friend know whether changes could be made to make matters easier?

Mr. Scott: I met a number of the trustees of the ILF yesterday to discuss a variety of matters. During the meeting, they said that they were going to lift the restriction on the upper age eligibility for the ILF from 1 March this year. I hope that that will be seen as a positive step.

I have listened carefully to the points made by several hon. Members. I understand the anxieties and am keen to put them at rest as soon as possible. For the moment, I rest on the words that I used in Committee.

Mr. Hannam: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for summing up the debate as he has, and I hope that we shall be able to pursue the subject in another place. I beg leave to withdraw the new clause.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 4

AUTHORISED REPRESENTATIVE

'Claims for the following benefits may be made by an authorised representative of the claimant as provided in the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986—

(a) Disability Living Allowance; and

(b) Disability Working Allowance.'.—*[Mr. Tom Clarke.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I sense the mood of the House, so I shall be as brief as possible.

I was delighted by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) and to see him at the Dispatch Box. I am sure that his appointment was richly deserved.

The new clause attempts to draw the attention of the House to the fact that section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, despite its considerable merits and having been unanimously endorsed by both Houses before Royal Assent, has still not been implemented. Having looked at some of the *Hansard* Committee reports, I do not believe that some of the explanations we received address the merits of the strong argument in favour of representation.

If the principle being applied to disability living and working allowances is to have any meaning for some of the most disadvantaged within our society, the provision simply will not work. We shall not have the safety net that we are all supposed to endorse if section 1 of the 1986 Act does not provide appropriate representation and advocacy. That is why organisations like Mencap, MIND and Deaf Accord strongly and firmly campaign for the very thing that the new clause advocates. That is why the 40 organisations that got together under the Act Now group are demanding that we have representation and advocacy. They do so not only because it works where they

have seen it, but because they know that the social security system will not apply to some of those most in need, which would be regrettable in the extreme.

If we cannot extend the social security system to all those who are entitled to benefit, including those with disabilities, we are denying a basic human right. Our system of social security payments, including the payments addressed by the Bill, is so complex and daunting that it is absurd to expect some of the most disabled people in our society, including the mentally handicapped and profoundly mentally handicapped, to understand it. The new clause seeks to go further than simply paying lip service, as the Government seem to do time after time, to section 1 and representation and advocacy, and it gives the House and the Government the opportunity to give those matters real meaning.

From my reading of *Hansard*, I understand that, in Committee, the Under-Secretary of State seemed to think that regulation 33 addressed this matter. In all candour, it does not. The Government seem to think that voluntary work is important in modern times, but none of the voluntary organisations accepts that regulation 33 is adequate. How can it be when councils such as Surrey refuse to deal with appointees, or when the Minister seemed to address all her thinking to tribunals? We want to make sure that all the assistance that we can possibly give to, for example, profoundly mentally handicapped people is given long before the time when a tribunal might even be necessary.

We address these problems in the light of all our discussions about community care. Although we might disagree about how such care is being implemented, I do not think that any hon. Member doubts that community care is about choice. If we fail to address their problems, how can we give choice to people who do not have representation and who perhaps cannot understand the system and could not possibly fill in the necessary application forms?

Fundamental to providing choice to people within community care is getting their income right. Income is important for us all. It is important to business people who can employ accountants and lawyers, and there is no reason to block opportunities for some of the most profoundly disabled people in our society. They must have the degree of representation and advocacy that the new clause would provide.

Organisations such as MIND have enormous experience in this field. It has told us that the proprietors of some residential homes are exercising the advocacy and representation role, but not in the way that is in the interests of the disabled person, whose rights and needs are paramount. That is an entirely unacceptable way to administer a system of social security and to deal with people's income. This is our opportunity to correct that.

Organisations such as Deaf Accord and SENSE rightly remind us of the very few deaf-blind who benefit from our social security system. There is clear evidence that that happens because, sadly, many such people do not understand or do not have the interpreters or the advocacy that I and most of my hon. Friends believe are essential if we are to address their problems, and especially those of the deaf-blind.

I think that the House supported the principle of advocacy and representation in section 1 of the 1986 Act, because it saw the simple justice of doing that and the need for efficiency. Many people might even have thought that we cannot be caring and compassionate without an element of efficiency. There is an interesting programme on BBC Television tonight, just a week before the second anniversary of the sad death of Beverley Lewis. I understand that the programme will conclude that, had the representation provisions of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 been fully implemented, that tragic story might have been avoided.

We must learn the lessons of history which time after time have been brought to our attention in the House and elsewhere. Because I believe that representation and advocacy are as important in social security as in the health service, local government services, housing and elsewhere, I invite the Minister to welcome the new clause. At this late stage, I invite the Government to endorse the principle of advocacy, which we understood had been unanimously agreed.

5.15 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I join in the congratulations from both sides of the House to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his maiden speech from the Dispatch Box. All I can add is that so felicitous and impressive a start to his Front-Bench work came as no surprise to me.

Turning to the new clause, let me say that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) did a superb service to disabled people by his work to enact, with wide all-party support, the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. His work deserved much better than the shameful dilatoriness with which the implementation of the Act has been handled by the Government. Having legislated in this field as a private Member, I am well placed to assess the importance of my hon. Friend's work. I hold him and his achievement in the very highest regard.

As we have heard, sections 1 to 3 of the Act are still unimplemented. They are fundamental to the Act's humane purposes. They affect millions of people with disabilities—physical, mental and sensory alike. They are also profoundly important to millions of carers. It really is outrageous that crucial sections of that Act are still unimplemented more than four and a half years after Royal Assent.

I ask for a statement from the Under-Secretary of State about the Government's intentions with regard to the implementation of sections 1 to 3. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West said, this is very much a Beverley Lewis amendment. It is thus of deep significance to some of the most severely disabled people in this country. I hope that we can have a positive response from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe).

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I support the plea for a positive response. I was a sponsor of the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and was delighted when it went through the House. It was three more years before we were able to get a similar Act for Northern Ireland. I understand that, as they were private Members' Bills, they did not necessarily commit the Government to expenditure. We understand some of the problems, but five years on in a Government Bill the disabled deserve the advantage of advocacy. I have heard no arguments in the House or outside among

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

practitioners denying the validity of the argument that the clause should be accepted. I lend my voice to those of hon. Members urging the Government to make a positive statement.

Mr. Ashley: If a disabled person is unable to speak for himself, it is unjust to deny him or her the right to have somebody else to speak for him.

It is deplorable—I choose my words carefully—that the provisions of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act have not been implemented. Acceptance of this new clause would go some little way towards consoling my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Wigley: I support the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), with whom I had the pleasure of co-operating during the passage of his Bill. It is now almost five years since that Bill was enacted and many disabled people find it difficult to understand why at least the parts of that Act which we are debating have not been implemented. Points were made in Committee about cost and the Minister may be in a position tonight to give the House more information about the cost of implementing clauses 1, 2 and 3 of that Act.

But more relevant to the new clause is whether its provisions are adequately covered by any other part of the Bill. I do not believe that they are. If the Minister can persuade me otherwise, I shall be glad to hear from her. If she accepts that they are not, will she, at the very least, give an undertaking that if and when the first three sections of the 1986 Act come to full fruition there will be adequate interplay between that Act and this Bill to ensure that the full force of those provisions can be used in relation to the new benefits that will come from this Bill? That is the very minimum that we should expect by way of commitment from the Government.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I add my congratulations to those of hon. Members on both sides of the House to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his elevation to the Front Bench. I look forward to many confrontations and useful discussions with him in the future.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on the way in which he moved the new clause. I honour and respect the reasons that he advanced for so moving it. When it was discussed in Committee in a similar form considerable eloquence and feeling were displayed in the arguments of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

But I have to tell the House that this addition to the Bill simply is not necessary. In doing so, I do not mean to imply any criticism of the measure that has been introduced, or to question in any way the importance of representation for people with disabilities.

The Government accept completely that somebody who cannot speak for himself should be represented in the important matter of claims for benefit. But that is no reason to give the authorised representatives envisaged by section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act a specific role in relation to disability living allowance and disability working allowance which are the scope of this Bill. I shall advance reasons why it would be undesirable to do so.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) rather dismissed my statement in Committee that the matter of appointees was already satisfactorily covered by regulation 33 of the social security claims and payments regulations. The evidence that he adduced for doing so was that certain county councils, specifically Surrey, were unwilling to deal with appointees.

We are discussing claims for benefits and that is what is covered by regulation 33. The Department of Social Security, our local offices and tribunals and all those concerned in any way with claims for benefits are happy to recognise, and must under this regulation so recognise, the role of appointees. If county councils are not willing to deal with appointees in community care matters, that is not within the scope of the Bill.

I am by no means dismissing what the right hon. Gentleman says—it is important—but that is effectively a matter for community care legislation through the Department of Health and I undertake to draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. But in terms of benefits, towards which the Bill is directed, regulation 33 fully covers the disabled person's need for representation where there is an appointee. Where there is no appointee, representations are still accepted from people who are clearly acting on the claimant's behalf. There is also statutory provision for claimants to be represented at appeal tribunals.

The new clause would in effect give authorised representatives the same right to make claims for disabled living allowance and disabled working allowance as appointees. It is quite unnecessary to duplicate the appointee provisions. There is, of course, no reason at all why an authorised representative should not also be an appointee and in many cases it would be sensible and desirable for one person to carry out both functions. But for that to happen, it would be necessary only for the authorised representative to apply to be an appointee in the normal way. It is not necessary to give the authorised representative a separate right to make claims.

It could be argued that authorised representatives should have an automatic right to act and not have to rely on the normal appointee provisions. I disagree, for two main reasons. First, there may be occasions when it would be better for the functions of appointee and authorised representative to be carried out by different people. It is easy to imagine, for example, a case where a person has been acting as an appointee for benefit purposes for some time, and so is well placed to look after a claim for DLA, but is unwilling or is not best equipped to take on the additional and wider responsibilities of authorised representative. At the very least, there must be flexibility to cater for that possibility. If legislation contained a presumption in favour of the authorised representative, as is proposed, there would be less flexibility and the arrangements that resulted might not be the best in the circumstances of an individual case.

Perhaps more importantly, the idea of an authorised representative is not identical to that of an appointee. A disabled person does not need to be unable to act to have an authorised representative. We have concentrated tonight on those disabled people who are unable to speak for themselves and to act on their own behalf. But there are those who are not, strictly speaking, unable to act and

there would therefore certainly be cases where disabled people were perfectly capable of making their own claims and would not want their authorised representatives to do it for them. In that situation, it might be assumed that the authorised representative would always defer to the wishes of the disabled person and that there would be no problem, but I would not wish to rely on that assumption. In any case, it would be wrong to take away through legislation the rights of disabled people to act for themselves—an effect that hon. Members may not have intended but that could result.

I am equally sure that hon. Members were motivated not by doubts about the effectiveness of the appointee procedures, but largely by a desire to press for the implementation of the remaining sections of the 1986 Act —a matter which has been raised by several hon. Members tonight. On that point, I repeat what I said in Committee. The Department of Health has recently consulted the local authority associations about the cost of implementing the sections and hon. Members will be delighted to know that a full statement will be made in due course. Again, I remind hon. Members that the Government have implemented the majority of the provisions in the Act. Hon. Members pointed to those provisions which have not been implemented and more or less suggested that we have spent five years doing nothing. But the majority of the Act has been implemented. The new clause is not necessary, in benefit terms, to secure any new rights, because the disabled are already fully covered. If they cannot or do not want to act on their own behalf, they are already catered for.

Perhaps Opposition Members should consider not those who, because they are seeking to make a claim through another person, already have information and are on the ladder, but those who cannot speak for themselves and do not know that they can appoint someone to represent them. We have commissioned a wide survey on information and the disabled person and we look forward to studying its results with considerable care. I ask the hon. Gentleman not to press his new clause.

5.30 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke: The hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) was charmingly unconvincing. I do not understand how acceptance of the new clause could prevent the disabled from representing themselves if they wanted. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and others of my right hon. and hon. Friends who drew attention to the non-implementation of the remaining provisions of the 1986 Act.

The Minister said that most of the provisions had been introduced, but in fact only 50 per cent. of them have. The Act was structured to meet its purposes, and was intended to be implemented as a whole. It cannot have real meaning unless the disabled have the right to be heard, and unless those who require advocates or representatives also enjoy that right. Unless the Government address that vital issue, those of us who supported that legislation will continue to feel that it has not achieved its objective.

The hon. Lady dismissed the argument that some councils will not deal with appointees. That is not good enough, and even if every responsible body dealt with appointees, that would still not be enough. We want to get away from formal confrontation. That ambition should appeal to the Minister and to her Government. If the Government do not accept the new clause, there will be more and more tribunals and formality. More disabled people will apply for benefits to which they have a right, but they will not be allowed the assistance of an advocate or representative, as the new clause suggests.

The debate has provided an opportunity to highlight the non-implementation of important provisions in the 1986 Act. This morning's weather forecast showed that it was colder in the hon. Lady's constituency of Maidstone than in Moscow, and she did not do much to warm our hearts with her contribution. However, I shall be returning to this issue time and again, but I shall not delay the House by seeking to pursue the proposed clause, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

INTRODUCTION OF DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE

Mr. Alfred Morris: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 13, leave out from first 'component' to end and insert

', a mobility component and an additional costs component'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 15, leave out from 'to' to end of line 16 and insert 'one or more components'.

No. 3, in page 2, line 2, leave out from 'awarded' to end of line 4 and insert

'more than one component is the aggregate of the appropriate weekly rates for all such components as so determined.

No. 4, in page 2, line 7, at end insert—

'37ZAA. Subject to the provisions of this act, a person shall be entitled to the additional costs component of a disability living allowance for any period throughout which because of a physical or mental disability he incurs extra expenditure as a result of:

(i) a need for extra heating;
(ii) the need to follow a special diet;
(iii) the need for help with cleaning, shopping and other domestic work;
(iv) incontinence or other disabilities that cause extra laundry or a need for extra baths;
(v) communication;
(vi) heavy wear and tear on clothing or a significant need for extra or special clothing;
(vii) attendance needs;
(viii) other needs which result in additional expenditure which he would not incur if he was not physically or mentally disabled.'.

Mr. Morris: It is fitting that the first amendments for debate are among the most crucial. That is acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Social Security in his foreword to "The Way Ahead", which identified as the first main need

"better coverage of assistance with the extra costs of being disabled."

Would that the Bill lived up to that laudable aim, and that the Government's legislative performance matched the precepts embodied in the right hon. Gentleman's foreword.

The Bill's failure to meet the broad range of additional costs incurred by the disabled provoked strong and sustained criticism from all the main organisations that represent them. They were led to expect that the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' findings would pave the way for a comprehensive review of benefits. Disabled

[Mr. Morris]

people also hoped for full and meaningful consultation between the Government and their own organisations about a workable system to address their unmet needs.

Instead, the Government chose merely to tinker with the existing attendance and mobility allowances and to cobble together, with a public relations flourish, the so-called disability living allowance.

The very title of that allowance is a cruel misnomer, which plays on the aspirations of disabled people for an income on which they can live with some dignity. In fact, it leaves a huge area of unmet need by recognising only the extra costs that arise from attendance or immobility.

Even the attendance and mobility needs of many disabled are met only in part; yet the Government publicly admit that the current savings made by their policies for the sick and disabled should not be seen as "saving money". In an interview published in *The Times* on 29 September 1990, the Minister for Social Security said that the Government's long-term savings would give his Department "powerful cards to play" with the Treasury. My experience is that to let the Treasury pick one's pockets once is to invite them to pick them again. I have never seen in print a franker admission that the Government's current policies for the sick and disabled will take them into profit.

I make no apology for reminding the House that average earnings have increased by more than 20 per cent. since 1979, whereas disability benefits are only 1 per cent. higher. That is the truth behind the Government's claims to have targeted the disabled for special help.

The disabled incur a wide variety of extra costs, and there are many examples of the magnitude of the unmet need that the Bill will do nothing to redress. Norah is 67 years old. She has complete lesion paraplegia due to an absess on her spine. She lives alone and uses a wheelchair. She has to buy in domestic help and occasional physiotherapy, and pay someone to shop for her. She needs cotton wool, soothing creams, vitamins and disinfectant—but frequently cannot afford to buy them.

Norah also has to meet extra laundry costs due to incontinence and catheter-changing while she is in bed, and because of her use of special creams and medication. Her clothes wear out more quickly, and she needs more clothing because she feels the cold more than others. Because of wear and tear and frequent washing, her bedding must frequently be replaced. Norah is also on a special diet that costs more. Because she spends so much time at home, and needs to keep warm, her fuel costs are high. Needless to say, her phone is a lifeline—but the bills are a worry.

The extra costs that Norah incurs because of her disability are estimated at £108·46 per week. She now has the unenviable task of choosing between two competing necessities. She says

"I would rather be hungry than cold."

That such a disabled person should have to choose between food and warmth is scandalous by any reckoning.

I have dealt at some length with that case because it helps to illustrate the very wide range of extra costs which the amendment seeks to meet. They are costs that some hon. Members and non-disabled people may find it difficult to imagine. Innumerable other examples can be cited. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux report the case from Greater Manchester of a 20-year-old disabled women who has to drag her feet because of her disability, and wears her shoes out very quickly. With the £27·40p. she receives on income support she cannot afford to replace them.

Age Concern gave the example of a 65-year-old man receiving attendance allowance. He needs three bags of coal a week, each costing £8, to keep warm. From his attendance allowance of £25·05p, he is left with barely £1 for other costs. He writes:

"Clothing and footwear are a thing of the past for my wife and me."

The Royal National Institute for the Blind cite the example of Mr. Cox, who is registered blind. He spends more than £30 a week on extra costs. They arise from the frequent cleaning of his clothes, due to falls and spillages, and much more than average wear and tear of clothing. Transport costs are also a major problem. Blind people living alone face even higher costs than Mr. Cox as they have to rely more upon paid help.

Deaf Accord say that:

"Being deaf does not currently entitle you to any benefits and this will not change under the Bill. We believe that there should be an additional costs component to the DLA for deaf and deaf-blind people, this would include the extra costs they incur to overcome their communication problems."

I urge hon. Members who have not done so to read details of the cases documented in briefings from Disability Alliance, the Disablement Income Group, the RNIB, Mencap, the Spastics Society and RADAR, among other organisations, where they will see that the examples that I have used are by no means isolated.

Why, then, have the Government chosen to disregard the overwhelming evidence of hardship among disabled people? Ministers have relied heavily on findings by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys which suggested that the average weekly extra costs of disablement were only £6·10p per week, with no more than half a million people spending more than £15. OPCS researchers have themselves said, however, that respondents estimates of their costs are:

"Sensitive to the interviewing techniques used."

They are not entirely satisfied about the reliability of the figures and advised:

"Because of all the problems . . . in obtaining reliable estimates of expenditure, all the results presented in this chapter should be treated with some caution."

Far from following that advice, the Government have used the results to make fundamental policy decisions. Ministers brush aside conflicting evidence presented by disability organisations. Using the OPCS reports more carefully than the Government, the Disablement Income Group found that the extra weekly costs of disability were £41·84p. Using their own questionnaire, the figure rose to £65·94p.

The independent living fund also provides irrefutable proof of the Government's very seriously mistaken view of the extra costs of disability. In fact, the independent living fund average weekly payment is £72.

The Government have also chosen to use information from the family expenditure survey in spite of the caution advised by its authors, who say:

"the evidence for substantial, unavoidable 'costs' of disability, to be met without regard to costs or priorities, is not to be found in research based on expenditure comparisons such as this."

Any calculation of the "true" costs of disability is complicated by the low incomes and often low expectations of disabled people. Many have no opportunity to spend money on items that non-disabled

people regard as basic needs. They cannot spend what they do not have. It can be hard even to conceive of spending which for most people is commonplace. One young disabled person with cerebral palsy, who is incontinent and uses a wheelchair, short not of luxuries but of necessities, says:

"Because I haven't got the money I go without; it's as simple as that."

5.45 pm

The Government should long ago have heeded the advice of the Social Services Select Committee which recommended Ministers to work with disability organisations to conduct and publish research on the actual and potential costs of disability.

Instead, the Government not only misuse the OPCS reports but make further misplaced assumptions. They argue that the existing attendance and mobility allowances make "generous allowance" for the extra costs of disability and that any money not used on attendance or mobility costs can be used for other costs of disabled living. That is deeply resented by disabled people and their organisations. They strongly refute the argument that existing allowances are generous and point out that blind people like Mr. Cox, for example, despite the extra costs, do not qualify for attendance or mobility allowance.

One finding of the OPCS is that digestion disabilities cause the highest extra expenditure, but how can people with such disabilities, who are not entitled to attendance or mobility allowance, use any part of either of them for their extra dietary costs?

In regard to people with high extra dietary costs, I challenged the Government at the Committee stage of the Bill about their misuse of research by Anita MacDonald, chief paediatric dietician at the Children's hospital at Ladywood in Birmingham, when calculating the dietary needs of people with HIV and AIDS and others with long-term disabilities. Her work was used to contradict my submission on Second Reading and in Committee about the extra dietary costs and also the submissions of the Terrence Higgins Trust.

In a letter that I have now received from Anita MacDonald she says:

"I consider that the information in my paper has been inappropriately used by the DSS against the case made for additional dietary support for people with HIV and AIDS. In fact, I feel very dismayed that the DSS has apparently chosen to use the information quoted in the paper out of context, particularly as I had discussions with an official of the DSS in the Autumn of 1987 . . . I would be grateful if my paper would not be used against the Terrence Higgins Trust as it is not intended to apply to patients with AIDS and HIV infection, nor can the costings be interpreted as being the average costs of a healthy diet."

That is a most serious refutation of ministerial statements, and I hope the Minister will now apologise to the House and address the very serious unmet needs of people with AIDS. The help that they need, and which the amendment would give them, is help to keep them alive. That is what this debate means to them.

This is an important debate also for Mrs. Christine Saltmarshe, a distressed mother whose 19-year-old daughter is severely disabled. As the Minister knows—although he has made no response and I must now recall her letter—she wrote to me in November to say:

"My daughter was 19 three days ago. She is severely disabled and her problem is epilepsy which is caused by severe food intolerance or allergy. Because of this she is on a very strict and, therefore, expensive diet. When she was 16, in November 1987, she was awarded the whole diet allowance under the Supplementary Benefit rules. In April 1988, when the new system came in, she was given £30 transitional addition, but of course this is being rapidly eroded as her income has been frozen and inflation soars. She got no rise at 18, and now has had a letter from the DSS stating that, in December, the Severe Disablement Allowance will go up by £10 a week, but that she will get nil. I have put in an appeal to a Tribunal, but I know the regulations are against her. I have written to my MP John Major and have had letters back from him and Nicholas Scott expressing sympathy, but saying she can't be helped, because of the regulations."

Mrs. Saltmarshe concluded:

"I wonder if you can tell me where we go from here?"

I have told the Government that it is simply not good enough for Mrs. Saltmarshe to be informed that her daughter cannot be helped because of the regulations. Ministers have the power to alter regulations. Indeed, the social security changes of April 1988, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) referred, were legislated for by them. The fact that Mrs. Saltmarshe's Member of Parliament is now the Prime Minister makes the replies that she received all the more curious.

I regard the case as one of undoubted, unmerited and unnecessary suffering and hardship, which the Minister and the Prime Minister can bring to an end by accepting the amendments. As they know, Mrs. Saltmarshe's daughter is but one of the more than 1 million disabled losers from the social security changes of April 1988 which the amendments seek to undo.

In further support of the amendments, I emphasise that the OPCS survey was conducted before the cuts imposed in April 1988. The importance of the amendments was reflected in Standing Committee where they had support from both sides of the Committee. The vote was initially tied until, in keeping with precedent, the Chair's casting vote was given to the Bill as drafted.

The Minister has suggested that a costs allowance would involve complexity. Yet his new disabled living allowance introduces 11 new permutations of benefits. What could be more bewilderingly complex for disabled people? Simplicity is important but so, too, is meeting need. In "The Way Ahead" the Government set themselves four objectives, including improving the structure of benefits to bring it more into line with the needs of disabled people and giving more to those most in need.

Our proposal for a cost component is completely in line with those objectives. It has the support of the Disability Benefits Consortium, an umbrella group representing all the major disability organisations, including the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, the Disability Alliance, the Disablement Income Group, RADAR, the RNIB, the Spastics Society and Age Concern. It also has the support of people in all parties and is eminently deserving of the backing of the House. After all, the House has irrefutable proof from victims of the social security cuts of April 1988 that even many severely disabled people are being made to go hungry by the loss of benefits on which they so crucially depend.

Sir David Price: I am sure that the whole House is grateful to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for bringing to the Floor of the House the whole problem of the extra costs of disability. As the House will know, the ninth report of the old Social Services Select Committee considered disability in relation to care in the community. A section of that report dealt with the cost of disability. I can be mercifully brief, because all the evidence is in our report. It struck the Committee that the Government rested their case on the OPCS reports. Surprisingly enough, we received a great deal of evidence that the OPCS estimates of the extra cost were not correct.

This is not the occasion to go into methodology. Certainly, no one disputes the integrity of the OPCS. If we had time, I could describe some of the reasons why the methodology was inappropriate and why the range was too wide. I give the House just one quotation from Mr. Ian Bruce, the director-general of the Royal National Institute for the Blind:

"so many disabled people have low incomes, if you say to them: 'How much more money do you spend on things because you are disabled?', they may never have had the opportunity to spend the money to start with . . . A lot of blind people do not go out very much because they cannot afford taxis. Now if you ask them how much extra they spend on travel or transport, they might say not very much but that is because they have never had the money to do it".

The phrase:

"they have never had the money to do it"

is important.

We made a recommendation as a result of our study, and the right hon. Gentleman quoted it. We asked for more research. In our report, we quoted the set of figures given to us by the OPCS, taking category 3 to category 10 of disability. We also took the figures provided by the Disablement Income Group. There is not a minor but a substantial and marked variation between the two sets of figures. I am not saying that one or other is correct, but there is sufficient disparity to worry the House.

Our recommendation was:

"the Government conduct and publish ongoing research on the actual and potential costs of disability,"

and—this is important—

"in conjunction with organisations representing disabled people, to inform future policy decisions about assistance for disabled people."

I wish briefly to put three proposals to the House and to my right hon. Friend the Minister. First, can we have general agreement that the OPCS figures—which were referred to in the Select Committee report and several other reports—on the estimated extra costs of disability should not be taken by the Government or the House as the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Secondly, we should carry out more research along the lines of the Select Committee recommendation, and the Government should implement proposals based on it. Thirdly, research should lead to a permanent on-going survey of the extra costs of disability, involving, on the Government side, the OPCS and possibly some appropriate academics, and the voluntary organisations which are in day-to-day touch with the more severe cases. I suggest that that on-going survey should be the basis for future determination of the rates of disability living allowance and should be used in all further calculations of upratings and readjustments, as the case may be.

I draw an analogy with the cost of living index, which is determined by surveys of family expenditure and is more or less accepted across the House. It is a fair way of determining the effect of inflation on ordinary people's incomes. A similar system should be adopted in future for determining the extra cost of living with a disability.

My proposal is modest. It does not involve doing anything in the Bill today or during its future stages, but it would help the people to whom I talk in the disability organisations to feel that the Government have a commitment to do what they ask in the future. If my right hon. Friend rejects that proposal entirely, on what basis will future upratings of allowances be made?

My proposal is so modest that I am astonished at my moderation on a cold night. I hope that, as always, my right hon. Friend will find my logic devastating.

6 pm

Mr. Ashley: I endorse what the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) has just said. There has been a great outcry among disabled people about the lack of provision for the extra costs of disablement. We have had a great deal of information from fervent researchers. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to them. They contribute so much to our speeches.

Diana Sutton has done so much for the all-party disablement group and has been helpful on this issue. Mary Holland has also been helpful, as has Peter Large, whose work is of enormous benefit. I will not go so far as to say that those people write Members' speeches, but they certainly help a very great deal. If I may be forgiven for introducing a personal note, I would refer to my wife, Pauline, who makes a major contribution to my work. Sometimes I feel like a spare part. The fact is that we receive a mass of information about these problems.

I do not see how the Government can retain the name that this Bill carries. It simply is not possible to have a genuine disability allowance with only two components and with vital costs excluded. Exclusion of these costs makes a mockery of the legislation. I suggest to the Minister that the Bill might be renamed the Exclusion of Vital Allowances Bill. That would be far more appropriate. A costs allowance should be included. There is anecdotal and statistical evidence from organisations for the disabled, there is statistical evidence from the OPCS, and there is common sense. In the Standing Committee, the amendment had all-party support. There was a tied vote, and the Chairman voted for retention of the status quo.

Many people were surprised when the Minister implied that those receiving mobility allowance could spend it on something else. He knows that that is nonsense. He knows that what is allowed does not cover even the costs for which it is intended. How then could it be used to cover other costs? I suspect that disabled people will think that the Minister is living in Alice's Wonderland.

They are concerned about such comments, but they are even more concerned that their requirements are not being met. They are living in deficit, and they are very anxious about that. They receive no help to meet those special costs, and naturally, as a result, they are suffering hardship. The Minister speaks of favouring coherent structures. I go along with that, but we must not have

coherent structures at the expense of justice. Making provision for the extra costs of disability would indeed be providing justice.

Those, like most hon. Members, who have their faculties and adequate income do not appreciate what a burden these extra costs impose. I should like to conclude by spelling out some of them, though not in actual cash terms. I know that this has been done before, but I shall take 30 seconds to do it again.

Handicapped people, especially handicapped children, cause excessive wear to their clothes; those who are incontinent need extra washing; those with stomach complaints and associated disabilities need special diets; those who are immobile—the very severely crippled—need extra warmth; deaf people—not myself, so this is not special pleading—need expensive communication aids; those whose bodies are frail are incapable of "do it yourself". Actually, as I am pretty ham-fisted, I am incapable of "do it yourself" anyway, so I get my wife to do the jobs.

Disabled people who cannot do such jobs have to pay to have them done. They also find it difficult to do shopping. All these things, although they may sound simple, are profoundly important. I hope that the Minister will take account of this argument and think again.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I want to speak on amendment No. 4, which deals with the extra cost component. I believe that its wording is exactly the same as that of amendment No. 6 in the Standing Committee, on which we had a very good debate. We have had another good debate today, and I welcome the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who speaks from such experience, as well as that of the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), whom I congratulate on the very good work that he does for the all-party group. The right hon. Gentleman does a great deal to ensure that that group promotes the cause of the disabled.

It is very important that we should recognise the extra costs that disability involves. From personal experience, I can say that there is great validity in all the points that have been raised in the debate on this amendment. I am thinking of such things as the need for extra heating and for special diets. People who are mentally handicapped tend to want to eat only certain kinds of food. It can be quite difficult and expensive to get them to change their habits. Certainly, my household gets through a large number of Kit-Kats as an inducement to our son Steven, following the meal, to go upstairs and start the next stage of the day's routine.

People who are disabled may need help with shopping, cleaning and other domestic duties, and there are such problems as incontinence. When we were on holiday abroad, our son refused for a whole month to go to the lavatory, and we had to buy incontinence aids.

So far as communication costs are concerned, I am not quite sure what is involved in our case, because Steven, while he likes to listen on the telephone, seems to be struck dumb. Then there is heavy wear and tear on clothing. Very often, disabled people have feet of different sizes, so two pairs of shoes have to be bought, and two shoes thrown away.

Attendance needs are one of the most important aspects of this matter. The home help care that we are offered amounts to just three hours a week during holiday periods. When one considers that care is necessary 24 hours a day, seven days a week, that is very little.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) said on one occasion that she thought that friends and neighbours would be very keen to help. That is not our experience. Indeed, one's friends and neighbours tend to shun one. I think they are frightened of what might be involved. One is glad to have such help on occasions, but I do not think that friends and neighbours are desperately anxious to rush in. Many people are frightened of mental handicap, and others may be worried about the possibility of being drawn into a commitment that might prove too burdensome.

I have no doubt that, in my constituency, families who are struggling to look after children—many of them, indeed, not now children but adults, and many of them profoundly mentally handicapped—constitute one of the greatest areas of unmet need. Such people do not get the help and respite care that they require, and it is not readily supplied by friends and neighbours.

The amendment ends with a reference to "other needs". Of course, there are very many other needs. We have found it necessary to get a powered wheelchair because my wife has difficulty pushing the ordinary one uphill. I was absolutely staggered at the cost. The price of an ordinary wheelchair is £130, and it can be supplied through the social services, but an indoor/outdoor powered wheelchair costs over £1,500, and is only now being considered as something that should be provided by the social services. So the extra cost is very substantial.

As has been said, we had quite a surprising vote in the Standing Committee. It was the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) who came out with the result that left the Government in control of the position. I should like to remind my right hon. Friend the Minister of the words that he himself used in that debate. I listened to them very carefully. On the first day of the Committee's deliberations, he said:

> "The hon. Member for Caernarfon will remember our previous debates, especially those about children under the age of two. Having resisted amendments in support of that for two successive years, I was not prepared to go through that experience again and we introduced the change. Who knows what might flow from our discussions on the Bill, but not today!"—[*Official Report*, Standing Committee E, 6 December 1990; c. 26.]

The Minister went on to say that I could make up my own mind. Having been given what I interpreted as a tiny inducement, I was carried away and decided to express my personal view when it came to the vote. I did not foresee that we should end up with a tied vote, so it was an interesting result.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The hon. Gentleman's support in that tied vote in Committee was not only widely remarked upon but was also appreciated. It was not just his vote. As the House heard tonight, the hon. Gentleman has deep personal experience of the realities of life for families with disabled children. In my view, it was a very important contribution.

Mr. Thurnham: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I thank him in turn for the way in which he led the Opposition in Committee. It was a very constructive debate all the way through the Committee proceedings and

[Mr. Thurnham]

the right hon. Gentleman's own contributions were excellently put. Again, he has spoken very well today, and I thank him for his contribution to the debate.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South said that he thought that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People was living in Alice's Wonderland. I am almost inclined to agree with him. The figures show that, compared with what used to be spent on disabled people, spending is approaching "Alice in Wonderland"—although, of course, a lot more money is needed.

Expenditure on disabled people was about £10 million a day when the Government came to power, in today's money terms. We have increased that spending at the rate of £1 million a day every year that the Government have been in power. We are now, therefore, spending over £20 million a day on disabled people. I very much look forward to another decade in which we yet again double our expenditure in real terms on disabled people. My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on helping to bring about this large increase in spending.

We might not yet be in "Alice in Wonderland", but I think that we can look forward to something far more like Wonderland than anything that we enjoyed when the Opposition were in power. They do not have the ability to manage the economy well enough to produce the wealth that can be spent on the disabled.

I very much support my right hon. Friend's management of the Government's programme of spending on disabled people. The Bill will bring about the spending of another £1 million a day on them. The Government have an excellent record. Therefore, I am pleased to support the Bill.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I join those who congratulated the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. I wish him well for the future.

Last Friday, I visited Hazel Court school in my constituency for the first time. It caters for young people with severe learning difficulties. As they grow older, they will benefit from the provisions of the Bill. The school has a high reputation for pioneering work in sensory education. Schools such as Hazel Court are to be found throughout the country. The Bill is important to the work of those teachers. They, supported by the parents and other people in the community, will enable us in partnership to deliver the programmes that are so needed.

Many of the children at that school suffer from severe brain damage, which leads to many of them having no sense of danger. Severe brain damage can also lead to hyperactivity. They need intensive help for much of the time. Additional money would go a long way towards helping parents to cope with difficulties over travel, health, welfare, eating, shopping and clothing. The rest of us do not experience those difficulties.

The additional allowance would also help those who cannot walk properly. In the past they have not always been able to benefit from additional allowances. Those who need to be regularly bathed or who face extra laundry and clothing costs as a result of their special needs would also be helped by the additional allowance.

During the short time that I have been a Member of Parliament, a few cases have been brought to my attention. I am not convinced that to date the Government have done all they could to help those with special needs. We have all had superb support from the voluntary organisations in briefing us for these debates, but I should prefer to refer to a case in my constituency.

A lady, Mrs. Ager, suffers from an obvious mobility difficulty. She applied to Norcross in Blackpool for a mobility allowance. She was turned down. Arthritis Care, a voluntary organisation, provided her with superb back-up and support. The medical evidence that she has provided cannot be questioned, so she intends to take her case to appeal.

6.15 pm

Mrs. Ager received a letter from Blackpool which said that her file could not be found. She came to see me in my surgery—with tremendous difficulty, because of her disability. As a new Member of Parliament, I was staggered that the letter from Blackpool she showed me was a circular letter. Obviously, many letters have been prepared to send out to people, claiming that their files have been lost and that no progress can be made with their appeals. I ask the Minister to ensure that local authorities or Government Departments do not send circular letters to people saying that their files have been lost. It is three and a half weeks since I wrote to Blackpool, and I have not yet received a reply.

It would be extremely helpful if carers received an additional allowance. Many hundreds of thousands of people are caring for others. They will be doubly penalised unless an additional allowance is made available to them. Many of them give up earning their own living in order to care for someone else. Unless the person who is disabled is able to claim the maximum allowance and the additional costs incurred, the person who has given up earning his or her living in order to care for someone else will be unable to benefit from the family income that is available to the disabled person.

That will lead to a double penalty for many people who care for others and for the many others who are in partnership with local and central Government. Without the help of such wonderful voluntary organisations as Mencap, Age Concern and the Spastics Society, both local and central Government would have very much more to do.

I was intrigued by the reference to index-linking by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price). My mind went back to the beginning of our debates, when the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) referred to local authorities. About a year ago, appearing as a local government representative before a Select Committee, I suggested that the money that is available ought to be ring-fenced. The view expressed about local authorities by the hon. Member for Exeter might be somewhat better if the money available could be ring-fenced. That would meet the objective. If we also adopted the suggestion of the hon. Member for Eastleigh, that the money should be index-linked, I am sure that every local authority would be able to meet all its future responsibilities.

There is no moral justification for introducing any age limits on any matter. It seems ridiculous and immoral that someone who might lose a leg and become immobile at the age of 66 should be treated differently from someone who loses a leg at 64 or 59. The immobility is the same. Our task must always be to see that those who have special needs can enjoy the maximum quality of life, similar to those of

us who do not have special needs. I hope that, as the Bill proceeds, that will be one of the matters that the Minister will bear in mind.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Clause 1 seems to be almost a Bill in itself and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who have had to persuade colleagues that this is a shortish Bill. My reason for saying that is that, although I share the concern for the carers as well as for those for whom they care, I wish to ask whether my right hon. Friend would have power under this or some other legislation to make additional payments for additional costs if the Government chose, after negotiation with the Treasury, to do that. I do not necessarily expect a reply today, but perhaps my right hon. Friend will reply by letter and place a copy in the Library. Do we require the introduction of an amendment such as amendment No. 4 to allow the Minister to have that power? This issue may become more relevant when the Bill is considered in another place. Although I am prepared to listen to what my right hon. Friend has to say today, some hon. Members will want to know whether the additional costs provision could be met in another way if the amendment were unsuccessful.

My second question is whether my right hon. Friend is willing to give an assurance to the House that if further and more direct evidence on additional costs is introduced and considered alongside the OPCS evidence—I am not casting aspersions on the OPCS, which works professionally—the Government will consider it. Obviously, they may not be willing to accept it immediately, but will they have an open mind? At the moment, we may be relying too much on the OPCS evidence.

Even if the amendment were passed tonight or in another place, or was introduced by the Government, I do not believe that it is rational to expect to meet all the additional costs that disabilities may bring with them. It is important to concentrate on the most significant and obvious. I accept that one person in 10 in this country has a disability, but I do not think that it is practical to have files on so many of us. We need to ask to whom we can give the greatest help at any one time. I am not saying that we should make a decision in 1991 and then forget about it, because I hope that, as we resume growth, we will see a doubling or quadrupling of our help for those with special needs as part of the social market economy, on which there is growing agreement across the House. We want to create the wealth and ensure that we use as much of it as possible to bring the greatest help to those whose needs should be recognised just as much as those who have company cars or big mortgages.

Mr. Scott: I have sympathy with the closing remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). Since coming to office we have increased expenditure on the long-term sick and disabled by more than 120 per cent. It is a record of which we can be proud. However, as my hon. Friend said, that still leaves us with difficult choices about priorities.

I welcome the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) to our deliberations on disability and hope that he will continue to take an interest. He said that he does not like the age limit of 65 as it applies to mobility allowance. It would cost about £2 billion to abolish that age limit. I do not know whether he would accord such a priority to that, but it would involve massive expenditure. We have sought to reinforce a philosophical justification in the Bill for concentrating help on and giving priority to those who are congenitally disabled or disabled early in life and do not have an opportunity to build up contributory benefits, savings or occupational pensions in the same way as those who have had a full working life and who encounter mobility or other difficulties in their old age. We have to make choices all the time.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is unfairness in that one in 10 children with cerebral palsy can obtain an average of nearly £1 million in damages if it can be proved that the cerebral palsy was caused by the doctor at delivery, when the other nine out of 10 get nothing except what can be provided through the benefits system?

Mr. Scott: I do not want to enter into that debate. Essentially, it is not a matter for me. There is a capricious element in some medical settlements that many people find disturbing. I do not wish to pursue that argument. I feel that the House wants to come to a conclusion fairly rapidly on this set of amendments. If I am tolerably brief, it will be through no discourtesy to the House but because we thoroughly covered this ground in Committee and I do not wish to weary hon. Members.

Whatever shortcomings the OPCS survey may have, it was the most thorough piece of work that has ever been done in this country on the extent, nature and circumstances of disabled people and we have largely, though not exclusively, to rest on its findings. It was followed up by the family expenditure survey, which tended to reinforce the findings of the OPCS. Of course, we will continue to research and monitor the situation and ensure that the new benefits that we are introducing in the Bill meet the needs of those who really need help.

If I am honest with the House, I should say that I will be surprised if we get matters right first time. We are introducing two new benefits that substantially extend the help available and bring, with associated measures, extra help to some 850,000 people who suffer from disabilities of one sort or another. We will have to research and monitor the impact of all this and see whether we need to make any adjustments.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne spoke about the service that we provide for the disabled. We are anxious to improve that. When we looked at the Department of Social Security's delivery of service, we recognised that it was frequently not of the standard that we would want. We have taken substantial steps to improve that, not least through the operational strategy, at a cost of about £1·7 billion for the computerisation of our service and the dispersal of jobs outside London to provide a more sustained commitment. We have a rapid turnover of staff in London and that makes life difficult. The error rate has come down, the speed of service has improved and the new assessment and adjudication procedures have been widely welcomed. I want us to build on that.

The OPCS showed that attendance allowance and mobility allowance were effectively targeted on those who had extra costs. The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) mentioned mobility allowance in particular. It is worth saying that the Government have not just uprated mobility allowance in terms of inflation,

[Mr. Scott]

but one year provided a substantial increase over and above inflation and removed the allowance from tax, which was a great help to a substantial number of people.

Many people spend their attendance allowance and mobility allowance not just on coping with their care or mobility needs but on a whole range of other needs. As I pointed out in Committee, of those disabled adults under the age of 65 who are in receipt of attendance allowance, more have needs which relate to disabilities such as continence, intellectual functioning, consciousness, communication and behaviour than have personal care needs. So the benefits have a much wider cover than we normally assume. As I have already indicated, we will need to flesh out in due course the findings of the OPCS and not rest exclusively on them or treat them as a bible. There will be more research, and we will have an on-going survey on whether the benefits are meeting the needs of the people who have them.

A point was made about the use by the Department of Mrs. Anita MacDonald's research. I have often referred to the study as evidence of the cost of a high-protein, high-calorie diet, which is recommended for AIDS patients in particular. The research is in the public domain, and people can make their own judgment about what Mrs. MacDonald says. I shall certainly respect her wishes about the treatment of her research in future if she is upset by the use that we have made of it.

6.30 pm

Our policy on provision through income support for extra costs such as special diets does not rest on Mrs. MacDonald's single piece of research, although, as I said, I have quoted it from time to time, as have other Ministers. The supplementary benefits system of providing for the extra cost did not work. The people who got extra help were the ones who knew their way around the system rather than those who needed help.

The income support approach, which delivers a significant amount of money—the disability premium is currently £15·40 for a single person—is a more effective way of getting help to the long-term sick and disabled to cover extra costs. The premium is paid on top of the basic rate of income support, which already covers the cost of a normal, healthy diet, which is usually recommended for those with HIV infection. Those who develop full-blown AIDS from the HIV infection are immediately entitled to the higher rate attendance allowance of £37·55 a week. They get that immediately, without having to serve the usual six-month waiting period, which will become three months when we introduce the new benefits.

In essence, the ideas which we are developing for the disability living allowance, based on moving away from the use of medical assessments towards the concept of self-assessment by claimants, mean that it will be a better targeted benefit which will be more extensive than those it replaces. I accept that we will need a doctor's input into some of the judgments, but as far as possible we want to depend on self-assessment. That will be a substantial improvement.

Over the Government's period of office, the take-up of attendance allowance has multiplied by a factor of three, and the take-up of mobility allowance by a factor of six. The two new benefits will be better than those which they replace. We will monitor their implementation carefully. Because of the points I have made about attendance allowance and mobility allowance, I cannot commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Alfred Morris: We divided in Committee on the amendments because of the extent of strong feeling in the country about their purpose. We do so again on the Floor of the House, for the same reason.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 231.

Division No. 61] **[6.33 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Leighton, Ron
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

6.45 pm

Mr. Wigley: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 4, line 34, after 'physical', insert 'or mental'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this, it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 14, in page 4, line 36, after 'or', insert—

'(aa) is suffering from severe mental handicap and from severe behavioural problems such that he is unable without physical control by another person to walk to any intended or required destination while out of doors; or'.

No. 12, in page 4, line 39, after 'doors,' insert

'to walk to any intended or required destination on unfamiliar terrain'.

No. 24, in page 4, line 41, at end insert

'or

(c) he is a double amputee.'.

No. 15, in page 5, line 6, after '(1)(a)', insert ', (aa)'.

No. 16, in page 5, line 21, after '(1)(a)', insert ', (aa)'.

No. 17, in page 5, line 39, after '(1)(a)', insert 'or (1)(aa)'.

Mr. Wigley: I wish to speak to amendment No. 13 and the other amendments linked with it, particularly amendment No. 14, which deals with the nub of the arguments that we had in Committee and which, unless resolved now, will certainly continue.

[Mr. Wigley]

In paragraph 37ZC, two groups are defined as beneficiaries of the mobility component of disability living allowance—a

"person suffering from physical disablement such that he is either unable to walk or virtually unable walk",

which is the current definition of mobility allowance, or

"he is able to walk but is so severely disabled physically or mentally"—

and I emphasise "or mentally"—

"that to take advantage of the faculty out of doors he requires guidance or supervision from another person most of the time."

Amendment No. 14 introduces a third category. We believe that there is a danger of those two definitions not meeting the campaign objectives that have been put to successive Ministers in charge of disability, or not achieving what the Government either say that they want to do or pretend that they want to do. I shall be charitable and suggest that the Minister genuinely wants to help the group about whom we are most concerned but has not succeeded in achieving the right wording. If he rejects the amendment and makes no commitment, I shall think differently.

Amendment No. 14 adds a third definition—a person who is

"suffering from severe mental handicap and from severe behavioural problems such that he is unable without physical control by another person to walk to any intended or required destination while out of doors."

We are considering severely mentally handicapped people who have severe behavioural problems and need more than guidance—they need physical control. When I was talking to my wife about the fact that I would be here and not in the Purcell room listening to her, she recalled taking our two boys, then aged six or seven, to be tested for entitlement to mobility allowance. She recalled the doctors asking them questions, which was absolutely pointless. The doctors told them to do this or do that, but they did not understand because they were mentally handicapped to an extent that made it impossible.

The general ground rules on physically handicapped people and even on moderately mentally handicapped people go out of the window when a handicap is so profound that children, or indeed adults, not only cannot walk in an intended direction but cannot respond to guidance and need physical control. In some circumstances, that physical control can be a tall order indeed and can be a considerable imposition on those who have to take responsibility for it.

The purpose of the amendment is to extend the higher rate of the mobility component of DLA to people who have severe mobility problems as a result of severe mental handicap and behavioural problems. The Government propose to introduce a lower-rate mobility component with the intention of helping people with less severe mobility problems, but the conditions for the lower rate are currently worded in such a way that those most likely to qualify are people with difficulties that are equally severe to those of people who are entitled to the higher rate. The only difference is the cause or origin of the individual's disability. In other words, people with physical disabilities would be likely to get the higher rate, while people with mobility problems stemming mainly or solely from very challenging behaviour or from mental handicap would be likely to get only the lower rate. I thought that the whole thrust of Government thinking in recent years had been to move away from the cause or origin towards what the impact would be.

The amendment seeks to ensure that people in both categories have an equal chance of getting the higher rate. At one time, severely mentally handicapped people who could walk, but not with intention and not without control, could get the higher rate. There was then a sequence of case law, challenges, appeals and disputes, and the Department challenged certain rulings. Eventually, mentally handicapped people who used to get the benefit found themselves not getting it.

I am told by the Spastics Society that, during his time as Minister with responsibility for disabled people, the Prime Minister approved the extension subject to verification by the then Department of Health and Social Security of the estimate of the small numbers likely to benefit. The Minister will probably recall that time, and there is probably some record of it in the Department. The Government have never produced any evidence against the low estimate made by the Spastics Society, by Mencap and by others in the Mobility Allowance Campaign. The creation of a far lower rate of mobility component, apparently with that small group of claimants in mind—perhaps the Minister will clarify that—is a backward step in Government thinking compared with what the Prime Minister said a few years ago. It is not the advance that the Government make it out to be. These people do not have less severe difficulties, but different ones. The new lower-rate component should be reserved for people with genuinely less severe disabilities.

The Government have consistently argued that the extension would bring in too many people and would cost too much, despite ample evidence to the contrary. In Committee, the Minister quoted the figures provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which suggested that 150,000 adults and children have severe behavioural problems and would, therefore, be likely to qualify for the DLA mobility component on those grounds. The Government are trying to shock us by using such huge figures. The Minister has used the figures as a bludgeon to clobber the case for helping the far smaller group of the severely mentally handicapped and those who suffer behavioural problems who should be entitled to the higher rate of mobility allowance.

The Government have never been able to refute the estimate of 8,000 to 9,000 potentially successful claimants made by Mencap and by the Mobility Allowance Campaign. The Spastics Society says that it considers that this figure, based on two research projects, which happen to have been undertaken in Wales, and on the analysis of the 1971 White Paper, which is entitled "Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped", is the most reliable that we have. That is the belief of most of the disablement organisations.

The Government have overestimated the number of potentially successful claimants before. Their estimate of the number of blind-deaf people who would qualify for mobility allowance was about seven times the number who got it. The Spastics Society considered the 150,000 to be a gross and totally misleading estimate. The Minister has, either accidentially or deliberately, confused the two needy groups.

The Minister sent me a letter because in Committee I said that the argument seemed to be at cross purposes with ours. The Minister appeared to acknowledge that when he said:

"If I may tackle 'head-on' the point you made in Committee about the startling discrepancy between our figures and those produced by Mencap . . . you were right to say we are talking at cross purposes. Their estimate of numbers derives . . . from the 1971 paper 'Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped'. That paper, based on three fairly small scale local surveys, was concerned specifically with estimating the numbers of severely mentally handicapped people. My estimate is of people with mental handicap or illness, resulting in behaviour disorder of a type which necessitates physical guidance when walking. These are two different issues."

Indeed, they may be two different issues and that is why we need the amendment.

In referring to that small group, Mencap is talking about people with severe mental handicap who need physical control. The Minister is talking about people with mental handicap—he does not refer to "severe" mental handicap—and people with mental illness who need guidance. He does not use the word "control". Those are two separate groups. Given proper treatment and support, people with a mental illness can be cured; people with a mental handicap cannot. That is one example of the differentiation.

There are two groups. One is a fairly large group of about 150,000 people who need help. The Minister has used the additional cost that they face as one of the justifications in defining the group. The smaller group of 9,000 or 10,000 to whom Mencap has referred and whom the 1971 survey revealed certainly need the top level of mobility allowance.

Challenges face families whose members suffer a mental handicap and who have behavioural problems, to the extent that they cannot be controlled without physical control and who cannot go anywhere because they may go off in the wrong direction. They may be able to walk, but it is not a meaningful activity for them. The support that those families need is as great as the support that is needed by a family with a member who cannot physically walk. Such families equally need taxis to take them around. They cannot take the disabled member of the family on the bus or on the train without having somebody to be a minder —at the best. Sometimes it is not practically possible to do that.

We have two groups. Both are needy, but the Bill has failed to address itself to the long-running argument, which we put to the Minister and to his predecessors, about the needs of severely mentally handicapped people with profound behavioural problems. The smaller group, which contains far fewer than 150,000 people, undoubtedly needs a high level of assistance.

In formulating his letter, the Minister has recognised that there are two different arguments. If he is honest with the House, he will say tonight that the Bill meets one argument, but not the other. I hope that, if not tonight at a later stage, he can give an undertaking to produce a further amendment that will meet the justifiable needs of the small group of 9,000 or 10,000 profoundly mentally handicapped people with behavioural problems who should be getting mobility allowance at the higher rate.

Mr. Hannam: I give a few words of support for the speech of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). The amendment represents part of the campaign that has been waged for many years by the all-party disablement group. Success was achieved for the deaf-blind with the extension of the mobility allowance to them a year or so ago. However, that left open the whole problem of those who should now be brought within the mobility allowance, especially the mentally handicapped and those who suffer from a lack of orientation when they move away from their familiar surroundings.

I support the amendments, but I pick out amendment No. 12, which deals specifically with the problem of the blind or the partially sighted. The Royal National Institute for the Blind supports the amendment as a solution to a problem that should not exist, as even my right hon. Friend the Minister would agree.

The test for the mobility component should be made more effective for blind and partially sighted people who lose their independent mobility if they try to walk on unfamiliar terrain. Amendment No. 12 would ensure that those who are unable to orientate outside their normal surroundings would be able to claim the new mobility component.

As drafted, the Bill is far from clear on that point. I do not believe, from the statements made by the Minister in Committee, that he is opposed in principle to this group of people receiving the benefit. The simple remedy is to get the correct formulation of the criteria to ensure that this group—I refer particularly to the blind and partially sighted—is covered. If the Bill could be amended in the way that amendment 12 suggests, it would include a new definition which would resolve a problem which it is generally agreed should not exist.

7 pm

Mr. Ashley: The House will have been moved and impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who spoke from direct personal experience. I support him and the group of amendments because they address some serious problems concerning disabled people, especially those mentally handicapped people who are discriminated against. The nub of the problem is that we discriminate against the mentally handicapped. The physically disabled and the deaf-blind, but not the mentally handicapped, are eligible for mobility allowance.

As chairman of the all-party disablement group, I was delighted with the success of the campaign which the group, including the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam), launched on behalf of deaf-blind people. But by eliminating one anomaly, we created another, and we must deal with it. We believe that we are being logical and reasonable in urging the Minister to examine the new anomaly of the failure to cope with the problems of severely mentally handicapped people.

We tend to assume that the mobility needs of mentally handicapped people are inevitably less than those of other disabled people, but such an assumption is nonsense. Their mobility needs are just as great, and the pressure on parents is phenomenal. I need not add, in that context, to the remarks of the hon. Member for Caernarfon.

In Committee, the Minister said that the new lower rate was intended for those who could use public transport. I do not believe that anyone assumes that severely mentally handicapped people can use public transport. I have not had as many dealings with mentally disabled people as with the physically disabled, but I know of a case in my

[Mr. Ashley]

constituency, a boy aged 15, which came into this category. I was surprised when his father brought him to my advice bureau. The boy was fighting, battling, scratching himself and trying to throw himself through the window and door. The battle to restrain that young boy, who was gravely mentally handicapped, was enormous. He could not be left alone. We must provide for people of that type, a small group who are severely mentally handicapped.

I am referring not to people who need only guidance, but to severely mentally handicapped people. I hope that the Minister will heed what was said by the hon. Member for Caernarfon in an eloquent speech, by the hon. Member for Exeter and by myself. Something must be done for this group of people, and I believe that the Minister will do his best.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Amendment No. 24, which stands in my name, asks for automatic mobility allowance, or for what is now the mobility component to be made available automatically to double amputees.

The Minister may say in response that what I seek is unnecessary because in the offing are regulations which will cover this group of people. I take it that the regulations will be made under the Bill. The Secretary of State said in an uprating statement on 24 October 1990 that the provision would be effective from April 1991. Why should that be done by way of regulation? If such a provision is necessary, why not say so on the face of the Bill and allow for it in the primary legislation?

It is vital to discuss the issue of automatic mobility allowance for double amputees in the current circumstances, when we face a serious land battle in the Gulf, resulting in greater numbers of unfortunate people begining to enter the category of which I am speaking.

Several cases of double amputees have been highlighted recently. I am sure that those cases have had an impact on the Department and have put pressure on Ministers to introduce the suggested new regulations. Among the cases that have been highlighted are those of Sergeant Andrew Mudd and Mrs. Sandra Stone.

A constituent of mine, Melvyn Wall, of Delves road, Killamarsh, north Derbyshire, had a foot amputated initially. Shortly afterwards he needed one leg amputated below the knee, and then a second leg amputated below the knee. From January 1988 he was in receipt of mobility allowance. That lasted until January 1990, at which date he was subject to the normal tests for mobility allowance, having by that time-been supplied with artificial legs. The mobility allowance was withdrawn, although there have been a number of appeals in the case.

I can best make the case by allowing the amputees to speak for themselves. For example, Melvyn Wall was reported in *The Star*, a Sheffield newspaper, on 13 January 1990 as having said:

"I don't understand why they give you false legs if they don't want you to walk with them."

In another article in the same paper, on 2 May 1990, he was reported as having said:

"I can't walk any further than a few yards in the heat we are having at the moment before it gets too much for me, so I just don't know how they can say I am fit enough to walk."

I imagine that in the present bad weather he is having even more difficulty in moving about. If he was tested in the conditions that we have today rather than in the heat of last year, a different verdict might have been presented by the doctors.

Mr. Scott: I accept that in the past there have been difficulties with some of the assessments, not least because the doctor who examines a patient can take only a snapshot of what the patient can do on a certain day. We are moving much more to self-assessment—perhaps with a general practitioner, a carer or a physiotherapist to support the patient's description of his condition—because we want to get away from the state of affairs which the hon. Gentleman described and make it easier for people to claim for their overall position rather than for what they can do on a particular day.

Mr. Barnes: That is admirable and I agree that there should be a self-assessment provision which can be checked by others rather than having an unfortunate snapshot. Melvyn Wall was moved by the district council from a house on a hillside, where it was difficult for him to move about, to a single bungalow pensioner's accommodation with a bus stop at the end of the street and opposite a newsagent and food shop. He could then wait until the shop was empty to go out and do his shopping because he experienced great difficulty if he had to stand and wait in a queue. He was the type of person who would try hard to overcome the difficulties with which he was faced. It seemed that he was then penalised for making progress.

I hope that we are moving away from penalising people in that way, and that there will be categories so that people such as double amputees, who permanently require assistance, will be granted mobility allowances.

I shall conclude with a slightly longer quotation from a letter from Ken Hewitt, secretary of the Sheffield Area Limbless Association. I might give slightly different nuances to the points made in his letter, but it expresses the feelings of someone who has lost limbs and describes the problems faced by his association's member, Melvyn Wall. The letter that he wrote to the *Daily Express*, which had previously given much publicity to the staff-sergeant Mudd case, states:

"Our member Mr. Melvyn Wall, was adjudged 'able to walk without sufficient difficulty' therefore the Allowance could not be paid and the application must therefore fail, this being written on the form received informing him of the decision. Two questions must arise from that. Firstly, the adjudicators are mostly people not having suffered amputation, and with due respect to their professional skill and integrity, there is no possible way they are able to judge what being without legs actually means. It is our view that observing the condition can in no way qualify anyone to appreciate what it actually means in terms of 'living'. The psychological trauma of the loss is sufficiently damaging without the problems arising from actually being in that condition, and the two together create a situation that simply cannot be imagined by anyone not experiencing it themselves. Secondly, what is 'sufficient difficulty' and by what yardstick is it measured. Does the simple fact that someone has decided, against all the odds, that they will walk again, overcoming the pain, difficulty, and problems it may mean, to be as others, a standing upright, walking upright, human being, not count for anything, taking into account where they started from. The fact that that same person could have simply sat and accepted, and chose not to, that that was their life from now on, vegetating in a chair and no one blaming them for so doing, and therefore being given the allowance at a cost to the Exchequer surely has to play some part in this if only to ensure concentration on amputation instead of what they have achieved in spite of it. That their personal guts, pride,

and will to succeed should be rewarded by having the allowance taken away is ridiculous and a slur on our compassion as a nation."

I appreciate that there is a mood in the House in response to those feelings and sentiments. Why cannot we cover the subject in the Bill rather than in regulations?

7.15 pm

Mr. Allen: I thank those right hon. and hon. Members who so generously welcomed me to the Dispatch Box this afternoon, and particularly the Minister of State for paying a brief but welcome tribute to my cricketing ability. I am here as the balance to the hard-headed and tough approach of my hon. Friends the Members for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short). I am the smoothie, the "poor man's Nick Scott" of the Labour team. Unless our good humour continues, I may be forced to reveal the number of runs that the Minister scored in that self-same cricket match. I give him due warning about that.

Mr. Ashley: Tell us now.

Mr. Allen: It will be all the sweeter for having waited.

I also thank the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security for her welcome. She said that she and I may have some confrontations—I hope not. Yesterday, we spoke on television together about cold-weather payments. As both of us were kept in ignorance of the Prime Minister's intentions today, we would do better to work as a partnership, not to be confrontational, because then we may progress further.

I am pleased to support the amendment of someone who is my hon. Friend on this issue, and I hope many others—the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). We have drawn sympathy from an unexpected source referred to by the hon. Member for Caernarfon—the former Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, now the Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). An authoritative source, the Spastics Society, stated:

"In his time as Minister for Social Security and the Disabled, John Major, himself, approved this extension subject to verification by the DHSS of the estimate of the small numbers likely to benefit."

We must refer to the numbers game later. Apparently, that statement was made to the all-party disablement group on 24 March 1987. Today, I wrote to the Prime Minister to ask about the watch he was now keeping on that pledge and what progress he felt had been made on it in the intervening three years. I await his reply to that—as I awaited his reply to my question on cold-weather payments—with great interest.

If carried, amendment No. 14 would mean that the upper rate of the mobility component of the disability living allowance would be paid to a person who cannot walk to an intended destination without control. "Control" is the operative word in those circumstances. The word is not "guidance" or "supervision", for which I believe the Bill concedes the lower rate, subject to interpretation by the relevant organisations, but "control".

To win the intellectual argument for the amendment, if not to win the vote in the Lobbies, we must answer two key questions. First, can the need for control justify a higher rate of mobility allowance? Secondly, if it can justify the higher rate, how should we seek to reassure the Government that it will not hurt them in public expenditure terms by as much as they fear?

Being the gentle member of the triplets—although I see that we are now joined by our fourth member—and being the one to take the softly, softly approach, it is my intention to try to win over the Government with that argument and reassure them rather than bludgeon them with too many facts and statistics. I want to reassure them that the higher rate will not prove as painful as they fear. I hope that the Minister of State will listen to my arguments with an open mind.

The argument that someone needing control, with all the implications of severe behavioural difficulties, has been put far more eloquently than I dare to try. It has been made by the hon. Members for Caernarfon and for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and others with far more experience, sometimes personal experience, of such matters. The case has also been expertly made by noble Lords in the other place.

Lord Allen of Abbeydale—to the best of my knowledge, no relation—talked some sense, from great experience, when speaking about one individual. He described the case of a man of 19 who was severely mentally handicapped. He suffered from asthma and epilepsy and tended to run out into the road without being able to hear people calling him back. He often needed two people to manage him out of doors, and he was likely either to sit down and refuse to move or to grab at passers-by.

Lord Allen of Abbeydale also referred to cases of other people who were likely to lie down screaming, to rush out into the middle of traffic or to attack fellow passengers. In the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon, such people need control, not guidance. That is the crux of the argument in trying to convince the Government that such people must be on the appropriate level of mobility allowance.

The central point at issue is less about the principle, which in a slightly more open atmosphere we could all agree on, than about the numbers involved. Those numbers obviously have fantastic consequences for public expenditure. I do not lightly dismiss that. The numbers game is central to the argument. Let us try to determine the real figure. Mencap states that a 1971 White Paper, "Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped", takes the view that 8,000 to 9,000 people fall into this category, which includes many people who are aggressive, destructive or over-active, and those who inflict self-injury.

In the past, the Government have estimated that as many as 250,000 people are involved, but they now seem to have settled on 150,000 as being in the B1, B2 and B3 categories, which the Government take as implying the need for some sort of control. It is difficult to bridge the gap between 8,000 or 9,000 and 150,000 who could potentially claim the benefit. Put in crude terms, if the Government's fears about the number are justified, it would cost an extra £150 million to upgrade those people from lower to upper grades. If Mencap is correct, it would cost the Government just £8 million.

It is a difficult decision, one of many difficult decisions facing the Secretary of State and his team. I understand the Government's caution, but I hope that, in getting sucked

[Mr. Allen]

into this numbers game, the Minister of State will entertain other considerations in trying to arrive at an accurate figure.

First, the Government can take some heart from their poor record in forecasting the number of people who may take up or be entitled to benefit. As has been said, the deaf-blind who may qualify for the higher rate of mobility allowance have been overestimated by Government forecasters by 700 per cent. That may not necessarily be appropriate to the matter that we are debating, but it merits some caution about stating that 150,000 people would automatically receive this benefit.

Secondly, let us look more closely at the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys data and analyse whether 150,000 people would take up the benefit. The OPCS figure includes those who are already outside the qualifying age limits. It includes those who are already receiving mobility allowance, due perhaps to physical disability, and many people whose behaviour does not cause mobility problems and those who would not claim. It also includes those who, for one reason or another, may not ultimately be deemed suitable for an award by the relevant authority. While the Government are right to err on the side of caution, they are wrong to overestimate, double-count and exaggerate.

If the Government cannot accept the amendment, they should consider two reasonable, and hopefully inexpensive, steps to help to facilitate examination of this important question in another place. First, they should publish all the unpublished evidence, statistics and assumptions, so that further representations can be made to enable people to arrive at an accurate and agreed figure. Let us see whether the various interested bodies, including the Spastics Society, Mencap and the Government, can reach a consensus.

The Minister of State wrote a long letter to each member of the Committee. I accept that in all good faith the Minister is seeking some middle ground, so that everyone can agree upon a number and make some progress. Will he therefore ensure that all data and assumptions are made available for all interested people who wish to help him in his difficult task?

Will the Government undertake that, if such a reconciliation is impossible because people are determined to stick to their own interpretation of figures—I hope that that will not be the case—they will seek to establish an immediate and urgent independent study? That study would determine the real number at the earliest possible moment, and that will give us common ground on which to take these matters forward. Those are modest requests, and I hope that the Minister of State can accept them and produce some extremely advantageous life enhancement for those whom the debate is about.

Finally, amendment No. 12 is about being able to walk to an intended destination, and it includes a qualification about unfamiliar terrain. That is obviously relevant to blind people. While people may be capable of walking, that ability can be rendered totally useless unless they can reach their required destination. The classic example was given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who said that a blind person seeking to post a letter in the letter box at the end of the road can often do so by habit or memory. That blind person seeking to post the letter in the next letter box in the district has great difficulty, because, although he is physically capable of walking, he cannot surmount the obstacles of unfamiliar terrain.

It is vital for the judgment about a person's mobility to be tested on unfamiliar terrain, so that independent walking ability rather than walking from memory is tested. That is the objective of amendment No. 12, and the RNIB understands that the Government are not opposed to that objective. Accepting the amendment would easily clarify the matter. I hope that the Minister of State will feel able to accept it. If he is unable to accept the amendment tabled by the members of the all-party disability group, I hope that he will take away the two issues that I left on the table and try to ensure that we talk about the real needs of the people I spoke about, rather than about the impractical problem of the numbers game. Let us try to resolve that in the short term, so that we can all do the long-term job for those people who depend on us.

Mr. Scott: I thank the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) and again congratulate him on the eminently reasonable way in which he has put his case. However, I cannot accept the amendments, and I hope that I can explain why.

Some play has been made in the debate with what has been called the error in calculating the number of deaf-blind people who might be entitled to benefit. That was not our calculation. We took advice from SENSE. I am convinced that the figures are right, but the difficulty at the moment is that we are not reaching the deaf-blind who should be entitled to mobility allowance in the way that we planned. We are having discussions with SENSE. We have looked at the assessment procedures for this benefit and shall launch a publicity campaign to make it much more widely known. I hope that we will be able to achieve better coverage than we have so far.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, in essence, what we are concerned about here is an assessment of numbers and whether it is possible to devise a way of ring-fencing the 8,000 to 9,000 people of whom Mencap spoke. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made that commitment. I inherited my job from him, although I do not intend to inherit his present job. As a slightly amusing aside in view of our cricketing analogies earlier, I remember turning up to take over his private office, and he said, "You've got a first-class private office here, Nick. They always know the test score." The staff have other qualities too, as it turned out, but that one was rather pleasant.

I acknowledge that that undertaking was given, and I am on record as giving an undertaking to do my best to find a way of defining those 8,000 to 9,000 people. I have had meetings with Mencap to try to do that, and officials have tried to find a formula. I am genuinely unhappy that it has not been possible so far to define such a test. The issue will not go away, but I cannot accept the amendment tonight.

7.30 pm

Mr. Wigley: So that we can be sure what we are disagreeing about—we may even be able to agree what we agree about—is the Minister saying that he accepts that the basis of the two figures is different; that there is a broader figure of 150,000 which may be appropriate to the lower level of mobility allowance and a smaller figure of

perhaps 10,000 with greater needs, and that, if it were possible to ring-fence and define those 10,000, the Government would be much more amenable and willing to act on commitments that have already been given?

Mr. Scott: I have searched anxiously for a test that would deliver the sort of result which Mencap was forecasting. It was not a cosmetic exercise. I do not want to go through all the arguments in my letter, because it has been placed in the Library and hon. Members have had a chance to read and analyse it. Questions 13 and 14 in the OPCS survey ask:

"Do you often have outbursts of temper at other people with little cause? Do you get so upset that you injure yourself or hit other people?"

The figures in that group alone came to some 40,000, which is very much in excess of the group that Mencap is talking about.

I cannot recommend that the House accept the amendment. I happily admit that the 150,000 lower rate qualifiers with a need for physical control arising from mental disability include many people who are mentally ill as well. But we are still nowhere near defining the 8,000 or 9,000 mentally handicapped people about whom Mencap is concerned.

If hon. Members wish, I am happy to go into greater detail. I will look again at the figures and arguments in my letter to see whether they need fleshing out, and whether I can give further information to those who have contributed to the debate. However, I regret that I cannot be sufficiently encouraging today to say that I am in prospect of being able to devise a test that will enable us effectively to ring-fence that group.

I can be a bit more encouraging about amendment No. 12, although I cannot accept it. I was rather hoping that I might be able to table an amendment in order to achieve the effect intended, but I do not want to do so until I am sure that I have it right and that amending the Bill is the best way to achieve our common purpose—that a person who can go by himself to the local corner shop because he is familiar with the journey but needs help to go anywhere else should receive benefit. We all agree on that. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and others for pointing out by way of amendment that the Bill as it stands may not have achieved that purpose. We are studying the matter carefully. We want to devise an abstract test of what a claimant's mobility would be like when he was on unfamiliar terrain. That is not the easiest thing in the world, but we are determined to do it. I hope that, on the basis that we are determined to achieve that, it will not be necessary to press the amendment today. I hope that hon. Members will accept my undertaking that we will in due course table an amendment to bring about the desired result.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister undertake to look again at my proposal regarding the publication of all data relating to the OPCS study? Will he also undertake to write to me after considering the proposal that there be an independent study should there be a failure to agree the numbers involved?

Mr. Scott: As I said, I shall see whether I can flesh out the arguments in my original letter. I am not sure that an independent study would necessarily be the right thing, but I am prepared to continue discussions with the disability organisations and have another crack at it, but I am not particularly confident about our ability to do so, because we have already tried hard.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) talked about safeguarding entitlement to the higher rate of mobility component for double leg amputees, which is dealt with in amendment No. 24. He acknowledged that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in his uprating statement, announced that the regulations will be amended from April this year to put the entitlement of those people beyond doubt.

The hon. Gentleman asked why that should not be put on the face of the Bill rather than be done by regulation. There are two reasons. First, regulations would take effect in April, whereas the Bill will not receive Royal Assent until after that. Therefore, we can do things more quickly through regulations. Secondly, in general, as I have learnt to my cost in three and a half years, although we have considerably simplified the social security system, it is still enormously complex. If provisions are seen to have faults, it is easier to adjust them by secondary rather than primary legislation.

I hope for those reasons, particularly because we can move more speedily on double leg amputees than would otherwise be the case, that hon. Members will feel that that is the right way to proceed.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful to the Minister for his response, particularly for his acknowledgement of the case put forward in amendment No. 12 and that he is actively looking at ways forward, possibly by way of an amendment in another place or any other way which can be devised. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) in whose name that amendment stands, and all of us in the all-party disablement group, are glad to hear that. We are also glad to hear his commitment in relation to other amendments.

The Minister seemed to accept the general thrust of the argument regarding the 10,000 severely mentally handicapped with acute behavioural problems, but at the end of his comments he dealt with the figures in a way that could be misleading. He referred to questions 13 and 14 in the survey:

"Do you often have outbursts of temper at other people with little cause? Do you get so upset that you injure yourself or hit other people?"

In his letter, he says that the figure for that group alone is about 40,000. He compared that figure with Mencap's figure of 10,000.

But those two groups are not comparable. The group defined by questions 13 and 14 is much broader. It may well come to 40,000, but if the Minister thinks about the matter, I think that he will concede that there is a smaller group, whether it be 8,000, 10,000 or 12,000, which can be defined in terms of the IQ test of 50—an accepted definition for severe mental handicap—and in terms of behavioural problems. Let us say that we do not argue as to a group of between 40,000 and 150,000 on the one hand, and a group of 10,000 on the other, and that we accept the Minister's comments, which provided a ray of hope. If we can ring-fence those 10,000 people, there may be a basis for action.

The Minister spoke of the commitment made by the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) in the all-party group, and added that he himself had given a similar assurance. I believe that I was at one of the meetings at which the Minister did so. We can welcome the

[Mr. Wigley]

low disability allowance for people who otherwise would not receive anything, and I am certain that the 150,000 beneficiaries involved will be glad to receive it. However, there remains the problem of defining and ring-fencing the smaller number involved.

Mr. Scott: That smaller group must be stipulated in such a way that the definition can be applied by adjudication officers throughout the country. It may be that the hon. Gentleman and I could, with help, define the individuals concerned. However, it will be a more complicated exercise to devise terms that local offices can effectively implement.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister and I both know where the group starts, but we are not sure where it ends—and that could be the difficulty for local offices. The challenge before us is to draw up a workable definition that is as watertight as it can be, although there is usually some blurring around the edges. If that can be done, and if the Government can retain the will that they had in 1987 to devise a solution, that will provide a chink of light. On that basis, I am happy to withdraw the amendment, in the conviction that we shall return to it. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 6, leave out lines 32 to 46.

This amendment is central to the Bill, because it aims to extend entitlement to all components of the disability living allowance to those who become eligible after the age of 65. In other words, it will remove the age bar at the crucial threshold of 65.

Under the Bill, those who become disabled after 65 will be entitled to the existing attendance allowance, but will receive no help with the costs of mobility. Nor will they qualify for the lower £10 rate of the attendance component. The Bill as drafted will not only reinforce a number of existing anomalies, but introduce new ones. A person who becomes disabled, for example, at age 63 could be entitled to £26·25p mobility component, plus the £10 care component—which he or she would retain for life. However, a person who happened to suffer a road accident at age 66, and who had identical care and mobility needs, would receive nothing. How can the Government justify that inequality?

It was argued repeatedly by Ministers in Committee that the OPCS survey showed that almost 70 per cent. of disabled adults are over the age of 60, and that the severity of disability increases in line with age. Almost half those having the most severe disabilities are aged over 75, yet the Bill would exclude the very people who need help most. Those over 65 are already unfairly excluded from receiving mobility allowance, and the Bill will further discriminate against older people with disabilities by denying them the new lower rate of DLA.

7.45 pm

It is pure hypocrisy to introduce a disability Bill and then deliberately exclude the group within the population containing 70 per cent. of that legislation's potential beneficiaries. The Government claim that they cannot afford to include that additional category. The Under-Secretary of State said that it would cost £2 billion to extend mobility allowance to the over-65s, but there are good reasons for thinking that that figure is grossly exaggerated. I do not expect the hon. Lady to describe the precise method of calculation, although perhaps she will, but the figure of £2 billion seems to presume that well over half those aged 65 with moderate or severe disabilities would qualify. Considering how difficult it is to become eligible for benefit, that assumption is wildly excessive. The cost of removing the age bar, as the amendment suggests, would be far less than the Government pretend. I suppose that one must be realistic and not expect the Government to take the leap all in one, but the absence of any phasing-in provision is something that we strongly deplore.

The Government also like to argue that disablement is an integral part of the aging process, that older people with disabilities such as impairment of their sight or hearing are not really disabled because those conditions are just a part of growing old and therefore do not need to be addressed. I remind the House that the OPCS survey found that only 35 per cent.—slightly more than one in three—of people over 60 were disabled. Therefore, the majority of pensioners are free from disability—and those conditions that afflict the remainder cannot be dismissed as the natural consequences of old age.

Also in Committee, the Under-Secretary of State argued that the average income and expenditure of disabled persons is not much different from those of the non-disabled, and the OPCS survey was called in evidence in that regard. The Government argued that there was little need to help disabled pensioners meet the costs of their condition. That is a fallacy. People cannot spend what they do not have, and older disabled people on low incomes struggling to meet normal living expenses may not have the money to buy disability-related items. That is far and away the most likely explanation for the small difference in income between disabled and non-disabled pensioners.

Ministers resorted to yet more casuistry in Committee, when they asserted that pensioners had enjoyed large increases in average incomes, and that it is better to target the young disabled person, who has not had the chance to build up savings and a pension. Again, most disabled persons are to be found among older pensioners, who have also been excluded from the state earnings-related pension scheme and from the gradual build-up of occupational and personal pensions. That group is clearly in need of extra help, which has not been enjoyed by some pensioners over the past decade.

The majority of pensioners are on very low incomes. Any right hon. or hon. Member who tried to live on a pensioner's average income would rapidly discover the truth of that. Most pensioners rely on state benefits for at least three quarters of their income. It is impossible for older people to meet adequately the extra costs of disability on top of normal basic living expenses with such extremely low incomes. It is not true to say that disabled pensioners have higher incomes than younger disabled people, despite what the Minister said in Committee. The OPCS survey found the reverse. The income of a disabled single pensioner was 12 per cent. less than that of a younger disabled person. That is another reason why older disabled people need help.

The last argument that Ministers used in Committee was the most disreputable of all. They said that the over-65s will be no worse off than they are at present. But

they will be worse off as a result of the Bill, because those with milder disabilities will not be entitled to the lower rate of disability living allowance. It is quite unfair and wrong to establish a principle of paying a lower rate for younger disabled groups but to exclude older groups for whom it would be most relevant. However, what is much more important and what we really object to is the fact that the Government are descending to the type of argument which says that so long as the over-65s are no worse off it is OK. Even if that were true—which it is not—if that is the sum of 11 years of Tory Government, and the pinnacle of a major review of disability benefits after half a dozen OPCS surveys and a decade of waiting, it is not unfair to say that nothing so clearly reveals the shallowness of the Government's commitment to the disabled.

The Government response to the commitment is a touchstone of their attitude to the disabled. If they accept that commitment, we shall strongly welcome it, but if they reject it everyone will know that their rhetoric of a policy of community care, of providing the fullest and most independent life for elderly and disabled people, is exactly that—mere rhetoric and no more.

Miss Widdecombe: We have had a very constructive debate and I was sorry to note a more destructive tone of argument near the end of the speech by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—an argument which was aimed less at the specific amendment under discussion and more at a general, and not at all convincing, indictment of the Government's policy towards the elderly. However, when speaking to the amendment, the hon. Member made some valid points which deserve to be answered in some detail and which might throw light on the Government's intentions with regard to the cut-off limit at 65.

First, when we said that no pensioner would be worse off, we were at pains to stress that we were not taking anything away. We have drawn up a Bill which extends a range of benefits to people who did not hitherto qualify. In doing so we had to decide where we would target the thrust of those additional resources and extra benefits. We did not say that we would take away from the elderly to give to younger people. We said that we would concentrate the thrust on younger people. That was decided not on a mere whim, but on the results of the survey, which clearly showed that there was a large and unmet need among younger disabled people.

However, the hon. Member for Oldham, West was right that there is an analogy between the young person who is congenitally disabled, or was disabled early in his working life, who has not been able to build up the advantages of an occupational pension, and the older pensioner who retired before occupational pensions were as prevalent as they are today—thanks mainly to the Government's encouragement—and who was unable to make provision for old age in the same way as younger pensioners, if I may describe them as such, do.

Because we recognised that analogy, we recently concentrated £200 million of resources on income support for the poorer pensioner. We acknowledged that there was a need which had to be met. Although I do not want to broaden the argument unduly, I must say that that is a better use of resources, and a more intelligent way to give help to the elderly, than an across-the-board increase in all state pensions regardless of need. Albeit through a different route, we have been trying to tackle the very problems that the hon. Member for Oldham, West mentioned. We have also tackled them through disability measures.

For example, mobility allowance was not even designed to be payable after the age of 65, never mind people qualifying for it. We have consistently extended the upper limit at which qualification would continue, so that no beneficiary has ever reached it. Right from the beginning, we said that there would not be an upper limit for DLA, so that once a person qualifies for it he will keep it.

During this argument we should not overlook people on attendance allowance. There is no third rate of attendance allowance. If we were to do what the hon. Member for Oldham, West suggests and allow people who are already over 65 to qualify for the third rate, it would not iron out an anomaly but would introduce a new one, because it would give rights to those on DLA which were not extended to those on attendance allowance.

The hon. Gentleman challenged me on the issue of costs, which I shall go into in some detail. The Opposition are looking for a figure, and in Committee we produced the figure of £2 billion. Previously, the figure quoted for the cost of extending help with mobility costs to people aged over 65 was more than £1 billion, but that was based on figures and numbers dating from the mid-1980s and was without the benefit of the OPCS survey. It showed that up to 1·5 million people—that figure was not dreamed up by the Department but was shown in the survey—aged over 65 might meet the qualifying conditions. However, there are considerable difficulties in making such estimates and I would be the first to agree with the hon. Gentleman that one cannot just assume that it would be 1·5 million. The Government's projection is, therefore, based on a lower figure. We estimate that it could be nearer 1·35 million people, which would produce the cost of £2 billion what we quoted. We did not make an exact science of that, but if it is the order of cost concerned, we have to ask ourselves whether that would be the best use of resources.

I stress to the hon. Member for Oldham, West that we take nothing away. To do what he suggests would create a further anomaly in respect of those on attendance allowance. We have chosen other routes to concentrate help on the poorer pensioner, whom he rightly identified, and whom we do not deny for one moment. We have tried to establish the best place to target our resources—the place of the largest unmet need. We have used the results of an independent survey and have not dreamed up the figures for ourselves. We have tried to come up with a Bill that vastly extends—as indeed it does—the range of benefits available to people who are not eligible at present, and we have tried to recognise a degree of sophistication of different needs within disability that was not recognised in the all-or-nothing policy before. By extending DLA without an upper limit of 65—once a person has qualified for it—and by doing the same through progressive stages with mobility allowance, we have again recognised and tried to benefit the older pensioner. Therefore, I ask the House to resist the amendment.

8 pm

Mr. Meacher: With the leave of the House, I speak again to the amendment. I recognise that the Minister, who is fairly new to the job, showed considerable skill in arguing a case which is indefensible. She did it as well as could probably be done. However, the argument is not

[Mr. Meacher]

satisfactory. First, she talked about concentrating the thrust of extra expenditure where it is most needed—on the younger disabled. She called as witness the OPCS survey. As I said in my opening remarks, the OPCS survey shows that on average older disabled persons have a 12 per cent. lower income than younger disabled people. If the Government wish to concentrate on those in greatest need, the older disabled need the extra expenditure most.

The problem for the Government, which the hon. Lady conveniently skirted round, is purely that of cost. There are far more older disabled—70 per cent. of disabled people are over 60. If the Government concentrated expenditure where the need is greatest—on the older disabled—it would cost a great deal more. The Minister should be more honest and say that the Government are prepared to spend only a small amount and therefore they have determined the group on that basis, not on the basis of need.

Secondly, the Minister tried to protect the Government's flank by saying that the Government had given assistance to pensioners. She rolled out again the £200 million given to poorer pensioners on income support. It is somewhat brass-necked of a Minister—I am sure that the Secretary of State knows this perfectly well —to quote that figure, which was a figleaf to protect the Government's nakedness when the former Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear on "News at One" that he proposed to means-test pensions. Not to put too fine a point on it, all hell broke loose and the Government quickly came forward with what might be called the Lawson embarrassment bonus—the £200 million. I am sure that pensioners are glad to receive it. I am pleased that the Government found another £200 million. But to make a virtue of what was a fiasco is a skill which even the Minister does not yet have.

Thirdly, the Minister talked about anomalies. She suggested that it would be anomalous to enable pensioners to have the lower £10 rate. She suggested that it would produce an anomaly because it did not extend to mobility allowance. I do not suggest that there must be an exact symmetry of structure between the parts of the overall allowance. If pensioners were asked whether they would like to qualify for the new lower rate or whether it worried them that it would be slightly out of symmetry with the mobility allowance, there is not much doubt about how they would reply.

In the end the argument comes down to cost. I listened carefully to the Minister. She quoted a cost of £1 billion, which I thought was the figure for 1990, but which she said referred to the mid-1980s. She said that 1·5 million persons over 65 might meet the qualifying conditions, but that the Government's best estimate was one and a third million and that it was not an exact science. I simply repeat what I said earlier. I should be amazed if the figure was anywhere near the Government's estimate, considering how difficult it is for people to qualify for the allowance. The numbers who can claim mobility allowance are remarkably low. I am sure that, like me, the Minister has had people coming to her surgeries complaining bitterly about the difficulties of obtaining mobility allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman consistently says that he has difficulty believing the figures. But the figures are the result of an independent survey done on a scientific basis, based on people who might meet the qualifying conditions, which we have further reduced, even before we reach a cost of £2 billion. Leaving aside his disbelief and his feeling that the figures must be wrong, what is his independent evidence that they are wrong?

Mr. Meacher: The Minister knows perfectly well that the Opposition do not have an army of civil servants. Nor do they have the vast resources of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Of course, I have no independent survey. She knows that perfectly well. Indeed, the Government's only source is the OPCS survey. We are not talking about the figures in the OPCS survey as though they were definitive in terms of entitlement. Entitlement is based on a judgment of the factual evidence from the survey about the levels of entitlement. That is rather a different question.

I am forced to accept that we shall not persuade the Government to make any significant improvement for elderly disabled people. I am sorry that the Minister took such exception to my remarks at the end of my speech. It is tragic that, after 10 years of waiting and half a dozen OPCS surveys, the mountains have been in labour and brought forth a mouse. That is not an unfair description of what has happened. Elderly disabled people expected better of the Government and their decision is disappointing. I still hope, bearing in mind the proximity of the next election, that the Government will be prepared to think again. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 1

Management of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance

Mr. Scott: I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 25, leave out lines 30 to 33.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 19 and 22.

Mr. Scott: These are minor, technical and consequential amendments which reflect the fact that the Attendance Allowance Board will cease to be an adjudicating authority once DLA is introduced.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 2

Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance: Amendments

Mr. Alfred Morris: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 26, line 30, leave out

"at the highest or middle rate."

The purpose of the amendment is to allow carers who are caring for someone on the lower care component to receive the invalid care allowance. It is about preventing injustice which the Bill, as drafted, would introduce.

At present invalid care allowance can be claimed by carers only if the person for whom they care receives attendance allowance at either of the two existing rates. The Bill proposes that only the higher and middle rates of the care component will passport carers to the invalid care allowance. Those who care for people on the lower rate of

the care component will not be able to claim it, even if they meet all the other conditions of entitlement, including caring for that person for over 35 hours a week. That is intolerably unfair and self-defeating.

As I said in Committee, and as MENCAP continues very strongly to argue, by introducing a new lower level of attendance allowance, the Government have accepted the argument that attendance allowance, as it is now available, does not address the needs of many groups of the most needful people.

Those entitled to the new lower rate of the care component are people who require some level of care, either continuously or for periods in the day, and thus need a carer to be available. They may need help with personal care such as washing, dressing, cooking or other domestic tasks and shopping. They are people, often severely disabled, who may not be able to live in the community without a substantial level of informal care of this kind and who alternatively would need much more expensive institutional care. That is why the Government's stance is self-defeating.

ICA can be claimed only by people who, because of their caring responsibilities, are unable to work or study full time. Surely, in fairness, if a person, because of the care that she or he provides, is unable to work, she or he should be able to claim invalid care allowance as a benefit to replace earnings. At only £28·20 a week, invalid care allowance provides but very limited compensation for being unable to work and for providing care from which the taxpayer benefits. Yet the allowance does provide important recognition of the extremely valuable service that carers provide.

In a detailed briefing on this amendment, which I hope hon. Members on both sides of the House will read, the Disability Alliance has drawn attention to the contradiction of not allowing people who care for an individual in receipt of the lowest level of care component to have access to invalid care allowance. Under the rules for ICA, however, carers are not entitled to the allowance unless they are caring for a "severely disabled person" for at least 35 hours per week. For the purpose of ICA, a severely disabled person is defined as someone in receipt of the attendance allowance. Schedule 2 tries to limit that definition, as from April 1992, to people who are in receipt of the highest or middle rates of disability living allowance. In other words, people on the lowest rate—£10—are not treated as being severely disabled and entitled to ICA, regardless of their circumstances and of the degree of care that they may need and actually receive.

This exclusion is in flat contradiction of the terms of other provisions of the Bill, since the £10 rate of the DLA will be payable only to people who are severely disabled, physically or mentally, under the new section 37ZB(1) that clause 1 inserts in the Social Security Act 1975. To get the £10 DLA, a person must be severely disabled, yet if a carer attempts to claim ICA, that person no longer counts as being severely disabled. Thus the amendment is concerned as much with preventing the enactment of bad law as with calling for fairness and justice.

I turn briefly to a case that was put to me by the Spastics Society. The case says more about the unacceptability of this part of the Bill than could any amount of formal argument. Janet Allen is a 21-year-old with cerebral palsy who lives with her parents. She is cared for by her mother. Her father works, but earns a low wage. Janet attends a local day centre five days a week, and travels there and back by the centre's minibus. She and her mother have worked out a routine that enables Janet to cope with her very severe disability as well as she now does. Janet qualifies for the lower-rate care component of DLA. Mrs. Allen works as a school meals assistant one hour every weekday and receives a net wage of £14·50 a week. She would like to work more, but this is the only job she could find that fits in with caring for Janet. One of their problems is that the minibus can turn up as late as 10 o'clock in the morning and as early as half past 2 in the afternoon, so Mrs. Allen does not have much time to do a job in between, as well as go shopping and perform all the other tasks that she cannot perform when Janet is at home.

8.15 pm

Because Mr. Allen earns so little, Mrs. Allen would have liked to work full time. However, she can work only five hours a week because she has to care for Janet. In fact, she counts herself lucky that she has found any job that fits in with Janet's hours at the day centre. The three of them get on well together, and neither the parents nor Janet want the alternative of institutional care. The lack of independent living schemes in the area certainly means that Janet's only alternative would be a residential care home. Mrs. Allen is angry that other carers who provide care for no more hours than she does get ICA while she does not. ICA would make a significant financial contribution to the household, would provide Mrs. Allen with a more independent income, and would make her feel that she, as a carer, was being treated less unjustly. Because of the ICA earnings disregard, Mrs. Allen would be able to keep all her earnings of £14·50 a week, in addition to her ICA.

For the purpose of ICA, a severely disabled person is defined as someone in receipt of the attendance allowance. I have sought to show the absurdity of what is proposed in the Bill, and I believe that Janet's case sets in very bold relief the need for this amendment. By accepting the amendment, and by looking at the compelling case for amendment No. 10, which we hoped would be linked, the Government have a chance to show some appreciation of the level and value of the work that carers take on. They would do well also to reflect on the amount of money that carers save them by struggling, often in circumstances of daunting difficulty, to care for relatives or friends at home, rather than place them in residential care.

As Mencap has pointed out, from April 1991 the cost of paying a carer invalid care allowance will be £31·25 a week. This is almost nothing compared to the costs that would be involved if the people they look after were in institutional care. In a survey of 16 registered Mencap Homes Foundation homes in London, it was found that the estimated weekly charges for 1991-92 ranged from £263 to £680. The residential care allowance available from the Government next April—as the Minister, above all other right hon. and hon. Members, will know—will be £218 in London. This is significantly higher than the current level of invalid care allowance, yet, as the Government must see, even the residential care allowance of £218 will not cover the cost of care. Have the Government made any estimate of the amount that they save by relying on the dedication of carers? If not, why not? And will they agree to offer an estimate?

"Alongside other fundamental criticisms of this Bill, the needs of carers have again been totally ignored."

Those are not my words but the assessment of organisations whose knowledge and experience of the problems and needs of carers none of us can question. Invalid care allowance is an already inadequate benefit in terms of the amount of money paid and of the number of people who are excluded due to being over retirement age. The exclusion of further individuals who provide a significant level of care to people who could not live independently compounds its inadequacies very seriously.

Mr. Ashley: I do not intend to say much about the amendment—the case is so obvious. The only point that I want to make is that the number of people cared for by a carer is completely irrelevant. To penalise the carer because she happens to look after more than one person is preposterous and the height of absurdity. If anything, a carer should receive more money and a medal for looking after more than one person.

I do not understand the Government's thinking; it is absolutely inane. It is ludicrous to penalise the carer because one of the disabled people whom she is looking after receives a lower level of care component. The Government are splitting hairs. *[Interruption.]* Oh, yes, they are. If ever there were a time for magnanimity, this is it.

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Mid-Staffordshire): I, too, do not wish to waste the time of the House by referring in detail to the amendment. Both my right hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) have already covered the ground adequately and, as always, very well.

I want to deal with the position of a group of carers who had hoped to benefit from the Bill. Sadly, it will not lead to additional financial help being offered to many people. As has already been said, many of them are women who care for severely disabled people for 35 hours a week. However, the persons for whom they care receive only the lower rate of the disability living allowance. That group of carers cannot claim the invalid care allowance. However, they offer a great deal of support and care and thereby improve considerably the quality of life of the persons for whom they care. At the same time they save the Government considerable sums of money. It is not an insignificant group of people—there are about 6 million carers, of whom 1·4 million care for people for more than 20 hours a week.

Invalid care allowance is the only benefit for carers. As I have already mentioned, it is available only to those who care for people for more than 35 hours a week. At £28·20, that amounts to less than £1 an hour. The Opposition do not argue that everyone who qualifies for the lower £10 component requires care for 35 hours a week, but what about those who do? They may have a carer who is not working and who is providing at least 35 hours a week of care. Why should that carer be denied any benefit in respect of the substantial care that she provides, as well as being denied the carer's premium?

The example that I intend to give can, I am sure, be repeated over and over again. Let us take the case of a 58-year-old divorced woman caring for her son who is aged 25 and a schizophrenic. He does not receive attendance allowance, but he cannot be left alone for long periods. She may also be caring for her daughter who has learning difficulties. Her daughter may be mobile, able to feed, dress and toilet herself and not requiring regular supervision. The daughter does not receive attendance allowance, but she may be eligible for the lower rate of the attendance component of the disability living allowance. Her mother might be working for only a few hours a week and earning about £22. She would not be eligible for the invalid care allowance because neither of her children requires 35 hours of care a week. She is also denied the opportunity and satisfaction of being able to go out to work. She is thus denied the opportunity to increase the amount of money available to her and her family. Such cases are not untypical.

If the Government are genuine when they say that they care about people in the community and that they are concerned about the needs not just of those who are carers but of others, too, they ought to accept the amendment.

Miss Widdecombe: I join those Opposition Members who have paid tribute to carers, who often perform a tremendously difficult job. Their contribution to care in the community and to the general well-being of elderly disabled people and less privileged dependants is crucial. They make life bearable for those who need to be looked after. No one underestimates the importance of their role. However, the amendment is specifically directed at invalid care allowance. That is not a payment for caring services. It is not a payment to enable a disabled person to buy in care. Invalid care allowance recognises that if someone cares for another person for 35 hours a week, it is unlikely that that person will be able to maintain a full-time job. The figure of 35 hours is adopted because that is the average length of the working week. It is assumed, therefore, that if a person devotes 35 hours a week to caring for someone else, he or she is unlikely to take up gainful employment.

That does not entirely prevent those who care intermittently for others for 35 hours a week from taking up outside employment. Much has been said in the debate about the figure of £28, but that is on top of the earnings disregard. It is not a payment for care and should not be regarded as being set at an insulting level. That figure takes into account the fact that such a person has forgone income from work.

The test of whether someone requires that degree of attention is that he or she requires prolonged and repeated attention or constant supervision, inasmuch as that person might endanger himself or herself because of the condition, or needs full-time supervision, or has other major requirements. That enables people to qualify for attendance allowance. Even if people qualify for the lower of the two top rates of disability living allowance, they will still have to satisfy those very stringent requirements. Invalid care allowance is not designed for people who need only a couple of hours attention when getting up in the morning, two more hours when they go to bed at night and a little attention at lunchtime. It is designed for those who require attention for a very large part of the working week. It is inappropriate, therefore, to link the invalid care allowance to a level of care that has been introduced specifically because we recognise that there are people whose needs are not being met under the present system, since they do not have that high degree of need. For that reason, we cannot accept the amendment.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) appeared to be speaking to an amendment that was not selected, because invalid care allowance does not come within the scope of the Bill. However, she has identified a

very important group of people—those who are caring for people for 35 hours a week and who are therefore precluded from taking up full-time or gainful employment. They do not, however, devote those 35 hours of care just to one person; they split it between several members of the same family. The hon. Lady knows that, although we cannot do anything for that group of people in this Bill, the Government have taken into account her concern. She will also be aware that since Committee, when she raised the problem, we have carefully looked at the provisions and that we are still looking at them. I cannot guarantee the outcome of the investigation. We may decide that the present provisions are right. Nevertheless, we are examining them. I hope that that reassures her that the Government have not dismissed her concern.

Mr. Alfred Morris: For my guidance and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), is it possible for the Minister to give any time scale? When does she expect to reach conclusions on what is a very important matter? Does she feel that in the case that I mentioned—that of Janet Allen—she may, before long, have some helpful message for a family which, I am sure she will agree, is in considerable and urgent need?

8.30 pm

Miss Widdecombe: I pay tribute to the care being given by Mrs. Allen, and I am not unsympathetic, but the right hon. Gentleman will understand that he based much of his case on that one instance. I do not mean this dismissively but, if we are to try to legislate for things such as the times of minibuses, it will become an impossible task. We are asking one basic question: is the person who is disabled in need of constant and repeated attention? I can give the right hon. Gentleman no hope whatever that we would be able to extend the range to help the case that he has mentioned. I can give him no specific timetable for the outcome of our investigations into the case of caring for more than one person during the 35 hours a week. Obviously, many things need to be looked at, including costs, definition and whether the provisions are adequate now. I cannot give him a guarantee about when we will reach a conclusion, but I can guarantee that we are looking at it seriously. Therefore, I ask the House to resist the amendment.

Mr. Alfred Morris: I hope that this extremely important amendment will produce a more positive and sympathetic response in the other place. I shall not press it now and, therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 26, line 31, at end insert—

'4A. In subsection (4) of section 165D of that Act (restrictions on entitlement to benefit in certain cases of error) in the definition of "adjudicating authority"—

(a) in paragraph (a), after the words "a social security appeal tribunal" there shall be inserted the words ", a disability appeal tribunal"; and

No. 20, in page 27, line 11, at end insert—

'7A. At the end of subsection (2) of section 17 of the Social Security Act 1980 (proof of decisions of statutory authorities) there shall be added the words "and a disability appeal tribunal appointed under Schedule 10A to that Act".'.

No. 21, in page 27, line 13, leave out

'the Social Security Act 1980'

and insert 'that Act'.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Clause 6

INTRODUCTION OF DISABILITY WORKING ALLOWANCE

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 10, line 38, leave out 'or'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 8, in page 10, line 46, at end insert

'or

(d) When the claim for a disability working allowance is made or is treated as made he has a physical or mental disability which is likely to last for not less than six months.'.

Mr. Meacher: Again, this is a very important amendment because it covers the central question of who qualifies for the disability working allowance. As hon. Members know, as the Bill is presently drafted, a person qualifies only if he or she is over 16, in paid work, has a physical or mental disability that puts him or her at a disadvantage in getting a job and does not have an income above a certain level, and where neither the person nor their family is entitled to family credit. In addition, a person must be in receipt of disability related benefits such as invalidity benefit, the severe disablement allowance, a disability premium included in income support, housing benefit or poll tax benefit, the disability living allowance or the attendance allowance.

One has only to read out that set of conditions for the problem to be clear. Large numbers of people with disabilities will be excluded either because they are already working, because they have a disability that does not satisfy the criteria for a qualifying benefit, because they have a disability that developed while in work or because, for whatever reason—it may be choice or a lack of information or advice—they have not claimed one of the qualifying benefits, even though they meet the eligibility conditions. It is for those reasons that the purpose of the amendment is to add a further qualifying category, namely, someone who has

"a physical or mental disability which is likely to last for not less than six months."

The sort of people who would gain from this amendment but who are unlikely at present to passport to the disability working allowance include partially sighted people, people with arthritis, a mental handicap or multiple sclerosis. Those are just some of the main categories. Not all those groups are likely to be in receipt of a full-time incapacity benefit.

If the Government are sincere in wanting people with disabilities to get jobs and to be able to keep them, I would expect them to accept this amendment. It is carefully drawn in stipulating that the disability must be likely to last for at least six months, precisely so that it meets the Government's concern to exclude people with short-term disabilities.

Also, the structure of the amendment—the Minister will be aware of this—is no different from severe disablement allowance, where some claimants are automatically passported through the 75 per cent. disablement test but others may still qualify if they provide other evidence of their disability. We have modelled the structure of our proposal on that. The amendment simply builds on existing proposals within the disability working allowance.

[Mr. Meacher]

Under those arrangements, at the time of a second claim after six months and for subsequent claims, claimants—according to a DSS note—will be given a list of functional disabilities and asked to show which apply to them. A simple point then arises. If the Department is developing a functional test to apply to claimants after six months of claiming disability working allowance, why cannot it be applied to claimants who are making an initial claim for disability working allowance but who are not receiving one of the passporting benefits?

That is the central question, and I hope that the Minister will accept the force of my point. If he does not, I should like to know how he can accept that the Department is developing that functional test for second and further claims but is not prepared to accept it for initial claims. I shall be interested to hear what he has to say.

When this was moved in Committee—I have the advantage of knowing the Minister's reply—the Minister said that it undermined the administrative simplicity of the system and that he was reluctant to return to the complexities of qualifying medical examinations. I do not think that any hon. Member wants to return to the complexities of qualifying medical examinations. However, what the Minister did not see and what we are trying to explain to the Government today is that the argument is irrelevant when a functional test of disability will exist for repeat claims for disability working allowance.

It is not true that medical examinations are needed to provide evidence of physical or mental disability. Why cannot such evidence be provided by a simple self-assessment questionnaire? I would be the first to agree that it should be backed up by supplementary evidence where that is needed. After all, since the Government have agreed to that for the purposes of the disadvantage test, which they favour, why not for this purpose?

Another of the Government's objections was that the amendment would require adjudication officers to make decisions involving complex judgments which might lead to more errors and dissatisfaction. Of course we all want to avoid errors and dissatisfaction, but if evidence of physical or mental disability can be based on a list of questions aimed at identifying a person's functional disabilities, the assessment would be straightforward. That again is what we propose. We do not believe that it involves complexity. We believe that it can be done in a relatively straightforward and common-sense manner.

The Government's other objection—as far as I know it is the only other objection—is that the disadvantage test is simpler. In Committee, the Minister said:

> "We used this definition because we did not want to have to go into detail about the particular incapacity of individuals."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 17 January 1991; c. 201.]

Again, hurray for that. No one wants to go into detail about the particular incapacity of individuals. Yet, according to the measures used by the OPCS researchers, in order to reach a measure of disability, the stages that will have to be gone through include selecting areas of disability, whether locomotion, dexterity, continence or any of the others, assessing the limitations resulting from each type of disability, rating the limitations on a 15-point scale of severity, establishing a common lower level or threshold for judging combinations of disability, and so on. In other words, there are considerable complexities involved in the disadvantage test.

For the reasons I have given, I believe that there are fewer difficulties in our proposal compared with the Government's advocacy of the disadvantage test. If the Government are sincere about wanting all disabled people to have the fullest opportunity to get and maintain jobs, I hope that they will accept the amendment and ensure that those who are excluded will be able to have the benefit.

Mr. Scott: I am afraid that I have to disappoint the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). The Government cannot accept the amendments, although I understand why he has tabled them. When I look at what he is trying to achieve, it arouses some sympathy, but I hope that I can explain why it would undermine what we are trying to do by the introduction of DWA and why it would radically change the character of the benefit itself.

We made it clear in "The Way Ahead" that we are setting out to help people on incapacity benefits to make the transition into work when they are ready to do so. We set out a number of ways in which to achieve that. Among them were ways of helping people on the margins of capacity to work by removing the barriers within the benefits system which currently put them off making the attempt to get into work for the first time or to return to work after an illness or injury. The barriers are inherent in the current benefits system, where much too sharp a distinction is drawn between capacity and incapacity for work.

The hon. Gentleman seemed to imagine that we could avoid this if we went down the route he suggested, but I made it one of the priorities in the introduction of the new benefit to avoid the need for a claimant to undergo a medical examination. We also made a special effort to avoid asking adjudication officers to make decisions involving complex judgments. The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the fact that I used that argument in Committee. None the less, it is a strong argument, and I still feel strongly about the point.

I admit that the change is partly to make the processing of claims more straightforward and partly because it removes an area where there is considerable potential for errors and for decisions with which claimants are dissatisfied for various reasons. If we had to rely simply on the evidence of the functional test which the hon. Gentleman has described, without confirmation provided by the evidence of receipt of a qualifying benefit, a much more complex and thorough test would have to be applied for someone to qualify for the benefit. What we have suggested is simple and easy for staff to administer quickly, efficiently and accurately; it will also be simple for potential claimants to understand their entitlement.

I have already said that the amendment would widen the scope of DWA so much that it would entirely change the character of the benefit. I do not think that we could avoid a medical examination. It could, of course, bring in a large number of people at considerable cost.

Having said all that, I think that everyone knows the intention of the new benefit. We will monitor its effect carefully to make sure that it is doing the job for which it is designed. DWA is a new benefit, an entirely new concept within the social security system. I and my successor will monitor it carefully. At this point, I cannot accept anything like the amendment which has been proposed.

8.45 pm

Mr. Meacher: The Minister will not be surprised to hear that I find that a disappointing response. I do not think that he has seriously taken note of the arguments that I used. It would not be unfair to say that he has simply repeated the same arguments that we heard in Committee. I tried, perhaps not as successfully as I would have liked, to answer those arguments.

Mr. Scott *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. I believe that I did answer them. The problem is that the Minister simply repeated the original arguments without taking account of the points that I put against them.

We are agreed about not wanting to see disabled people having to undergo difficult or complex medical examinations. We do not want complex decisions being taken by adjudicating officers. The point that I was making, which he has not answered at all, is that the functional test of disability is the one that the Department is itself proposing for repeat claims. I asked a question which the Minister did not answer; if it can be done the second, third or fourth time, why cannot it be done the first time?

Mr. Scott: Precisely because it is clear that the person has a qualifying benefit, which in a sense is prima facie evidence of entitlement to the allowance. If a person does not have that, it means that we would have to have a complex examination or test, which would undermine the simplicity of the benefit.

Mr. Meacher: In that case, the argument between us simply revolves round whether a functional test of disability is adequate in the first instance. It is clear from the exchange that the Minister believes that a medical examination cannot be avoided; in his view, it is requisite. We have to take account of the considerable evidence provided by the disability organisations—a serious, thoughtful and reflective body of opinion, with enormous experience of dealing with the disabled. It is their view that the functional test of disability could be effective. No doubt the Minister would say that they would take that view.

Although the Minister did not make much of this, I suspect that the real reason for his decision is that he believes that, if a functional test were to be used in the first instance, it would widen the scope rather too much, and we would be back once again to the question of cost. I suspect that he let that out a little carelessly, but perhaps I should be grateful for his honesty. I suspect that that is the real reason. I do not think that there is a technical problem. I believe that the Government wish to constrain the number of beneficiaries reasonably tightly and that the Department believes that it can do that only on the basis of a medical examination.

I can only stress the arguments that I used at the beginning of my remarks about the considerable number of people who will be disappointed. They believe that they have entitlement, but they will find that they are excluded. That will rebound on the Government. I support the purpose behind the new benefit, but I believe that it is tragic and short-sighted to exclude a significant number of disabled people. The amendment would enable people who are excluded to be included. It is a great pity that they will be omitted.

I hope that, once again, the Government will reflect further on the argument and on this exchange. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 11, line 48, after 'percentage', insert

'(which shall not exceed 40%)'.

This small amendment arises from a debate in Committee, in which we sought to reduce the taper of 40 per cent. to encourage disabled people into work. The Minister decided that the Government could not afford that, which showed their lack of foresight. They should try to encourage disabled people into work.

We proved in Committee, and again today, that disabled people require more expenditure, attention and care than able-bodied people. We ask the Government to reconsider a reduction in the taper of 40 per cent. It would cost the Government considerably less than they suggested in Committee, and encouraging disabled people into work by giving them more money would be a worthwhile measure. A 94 per cent. tax on extra earnings is extortionate, and we would not impose that on anybody else.

Miss Widdecombe: A shallower taper would give more money to all recipients, but it would give most to those who are better off. We do not regard that as a sensible use of the £30 million that it would cost, so I must resist the amendment.

Mr. McKay: I am not satisfied with the Minister's answer. We shall return to the subject, at which time we will remind her of her words. Many people will be disappointed, but I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 4

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 22, in page 31, line 41, column 3, at end insert—

'In section 165D(4), in paragraph (a) of the definition of "adjudicating authority", the words "the Attendance Allowance Board,".'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Clause 12

REGULATIONS

Amendment made: No. 23, in page 15, line 24, at beginning insert—

'.—(1) A statutory instrument containing (whether alone or with other provisions)

(a) regulations under Chapter II of Part II of the 1975 Act which relate to disability living allowance and are made before the day in respect of which disability living allowance is payable;

(b) regulations under sections 100A to 100D or section 104A of that Act which relate to attendance allowance or disability living allowance and are made before that day;—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

8.52 pm

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I do not want to make a lengthy speech. We did well in Committee, with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), in examining the Bill in considerable detail, and today we have had a good and constructive Report stage.

The Bill will introduce two important new benefits. The disability living allowance will combine and extend the impact of attendance and mobility allowances in an effective way. The disability working allowance will, for the first time, offer a real incentive for disabled people who wish to work and can work to move, as it were, step by step into employment and contribute effectively to the enterprise that they support.

I said on Second Reading that the pattern of benefits that we have introduced is but part of what all hon. Members concerned about the subject want—a series of measures that improve the lives of disabled people. Accessibility to employment is an immensely important part of that, but so too is accessibility to leisure facilities and to the other matters that the rest of us are able, for the time being at least, to take for granted.

Technology will make it increasingly possible for disabled people to acquire independence and to earn their own living. I spend every Friday that I can away from Whitehall, visiting the people who work for disabled people and who try their best, through medical or technological progress, to help them to improve the quality of their life. The Bill is an important part of that overall package, and I commend it to the House.

8.54 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris: I pay tribute to my colleagues on the Standing Committee who, over a period of many weeks, tried hard to improve the Bill in many important respects.

The Minister is aware that we regard the disability living allowance mainly as the bundling together of two existing allowances. As the right hon. Gentleman is fully aware, the outcome is strongly criticised by all the organisations of and for disabled people. He represents DLA and disability working allowance as the most generous offer since the miracle of the loaves and fishes. That is not how potential recipients of the new benefits see the provision he is making.

We have sought to give voice to the views of those who spend their lives on case work with disabled people of all kinds. I have the impression that the Minister tried to convince his Treasury colleagues that improvements to the Bill should be made. That has not happened and in Committee, as again today, he was unable to respond as positively as we wished even to some of the most compelling claims on behalf of people who are disabled physically, mentally and sensorily.

I hope very much that, in another place, it will be possible to improve the Bill in the ways we seek. We shall certainly, at any further opportunity, come back to the case that we have argued for much better provision for Britain's 6·5 million disabled people, their families and carers.

All of us know that there is a vast agenda of unmet need. Over the past 20 years, there has been much progress. This is still, however, a very neglected area of social policy. We must all hope that, before the Bill receives Royal Assent, it will go much further towards what disabled people and their organisations have been asking for. I believe their claims are reasonable. We shall go on doing our best to reflect them here in the House of Commons.

8.58 pm

Mr. Ashley: The Bill is a tragically missed opportunity to make a great advance for disabled people. I welcome the few crumbs, but I believe that it is a missed opportunity for a thousand reasons, including three main reasons.

First, the Bill fails to deal with the problem of the cost of disablement. We have explained that ad infinitum. The costs of disability are fundamental to the enjoyment of life. People who cannot have the costs met by the Government are living in a style that is, to say the least, unfortunate —or, to put it more realistically, degrading. I am sorry that the Government have missed this opportunity.

Secondly, a group of disabled people are being shunted in the wrong direction—into care of the local authority. We used to use the phrase that the problem was "being swept under the carpet". In this case, disabled people are being dropped on to the local authority. I regret that, because local authorities simply cannot deal with the problems of disabled people.

Thirdly, the Bill fails inasmuch as, in all the problems of disabled people that have been addressed by the Government, no coherent structure has been put forward by the various Ministers who have spoken. That is a failure of neglect. The Government are neglecting to cope with the fundamental problems of physically and mentally disabled people. I regret to say that, but those are my real feelings about the Bill.

9 pm

Mrs. Heal: For people who are unemployed today, finding work in the present climate can be difficult. They might be teenagers with some GCSEs or with some practical ability, but they will still meet problems in seeking work. They might be young mothers who are trying either to return to work or to obtain work to supplement the family income and so help with the ever-increasing costs of maintaining a home and a family. They might be single and trying to live independently, either by buying or renting their own home. They might be older people who have been employed and then made redundant.

I will add one further description to those categories of people which will make things even more difficult for them. They may also be coping with a disability. Their chances of finding work are then made even more difficult. They and the many organisations that represent people with disabilities looked forward to the Government's proposals.

Last year, the Minister spoke of new horizons for people with disabilities. Sadly, many who had hoped to see some opportunity of work or of increasing their income will be disappointed. The introduction of the disability living allowance and of the disability working allowance fails to meet their needs. The horizon is somewhat cloudy.

If the Government mean what they say about providing horizons, about providing new opportunities and about enabling people to progress through to employment and away from dependency, they would have accepted the amendments that the Opposition tabled.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

European Community Documents

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): We now come to the motion on milk quotas.

9.3 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will know that the motion is identical to a motion passed yesterday morning by Standing Committee A on European Legislation. You will be aware that, normally, with other such Committees in the past, the motion that was passed stood on the remaining Orders of the Day for at least a day to enable any hon. Member to table an amendment if he so chose. If any hon. Member had chosen to do so today, it would be a manuscript amendment. Is it in the best practice of the House to table the motion on the effective Orders today? If so, is it in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not out of order. However, I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, and I very much hope that his remarks will be drawn to the attention of the Leader of the House.

Milk Quotas

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 18th January 1991 relating to rules for the application of levy in the milk and milk products sector; regrets the precipitate action taken by the Commission to alter quota legislation; and supports the steps taken by the Government in opposing this proposal.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

Air Traffic (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

9.5 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Last September the Government asked the Civil Aviation Authority to advise on whether the traffic distribution rules should continue for London and said that by March this year the CAA's advice should be forthcoming. In November the Government brought forward the timetable and asked for the advice by mid-January. The result was the CAA's report, CAP578, published on 22 January.

The traffic distribution rules are technical and have far-reaching consequences. They were introduced de facto in 1977 and were made formal by the Government in 1979. Among other things, they seek to affect Heathrow and British aviation in a significant way. They seek to restrict entry to Heathrow to those airlines already having rights to land there. They impose whole or partial bans on charter flights, on all cargo flights and on business and general aviation at Heathrow. They set out in 1977 to encourage the use of London Gatwick. The purpose of the rules, when first introduced, was to limit the pressure on Heathrow and encourage the development of Gatwick.

Against that background, it is remarkably disappointing that the CAA's report is, to put it mildly, wishy-washy. I find it very naive. Its conclusions are singularly limp and unconvincing. For example, paragraph 4.6 on page 14 says:

> "As several respondents pointed out, the existing rule has heavily distorted the development of services at Heathrow and Gatwick. The Authority's predisposition is therefore to recommend abolition of the rule unless the arguments point firmly in favour of its retention."

It goes on to say that, on the balance of advantage, rule 1 should be abolished, and in paragraph 4.7 it says:

> "If Rule 1 were removed the Authority sees little logic in retaining Rules 2 and 3."

One could hardly call that gripping or convincing stuff. It means, "You might as well do that because we are not quite sure." It is in that spirit that I criticise the report.

I have initiated this debate because I am one of 14 what might be described as Heathrow Members. We are all deeply worried about the implications of the report. Perhaps I should make it clear for the record who we 14 are, and as the hour is earlier than usual for the Adjournment, I assure any of my hon. Friends who happen to turn up that I shall be happy to allow them to occupy some of the time available.

I refer to my hon. Friends the Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), for Esher (Mr. Taylor), for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls), for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), for Slough (Mr. Watts), for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn); my right hon. Friends the Members for Brentford and Isleworth (Sir B. Hayhoe) and for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie); and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground). I name them because it is important to realise how many hon. Members are affected by the report, and in so far as it is possible for me to claim to speak on behalf

[Mr. David Wilshire]

of my hon. Friends, my remarks tonight represent very much a heartfelt contribution from all the hon. Members I have named.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I apologise to my hon. Friend in advance because I shall not be able to stay beyond 10 o'clock and so will not hear all the debate. Does he agree that interest in this subject goes wider than those famous 14? As a result of the current consultation exercise on the distribution of air traffic into and from the south-east, the number of constituencies affected by decisions taken in relation to the CAA report and what happens in that connection in the south-east concern the whole of the south of the country and the midlands. We in Bristol are as intimately affected by those decisions as are the 14 right hon. and hon. Members to whom my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Wilshire: I accept my hon. Friend's point and shall come to the national implications. It is just that 14 of us see a clear constituency interest at stake and are working together to try to protect a group of people in that part of the south-east. My hon. Friend is right to say that the report has serious implications for Bristol airport and his constituency might have poorer air services were the recommendations in the report to go ahead.

The 14 of us have already prepared a document setting out our concerns, which we have put to the Secretary of State, urging him not to proceed in that way. I should like to place on record my thanks to the Secretary of State for meeting us at such short notice.

I shall summarise for the House the concerns that we have been considering for the past few days, which fall into two groups: first, the local aspects about which, as a group of Heathrow hon. Members, we are rightly concerned; and secondly, the national and international implications that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) mentioned. I shall place those concerns in the context of Government policy. The report starts by explaining that the CAA was given four policy objectives and we might usefully test how far the report has met those objectives. The first policy objective is:

"To take into account the full extent of the contribution which may be made by airports outside the London area"—

exactly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West. Paragraph 3.2 states that

"abolition would have a mixed effect."

It should be remembered that we are trying to benefit the regional airports outside London. The effects mentioned in the report include fewer regional flights into Heathrow, less choice at regional airports and making it harder for regional airports to make a profit and contribute to the national aviation policy. Thus the report fails its first test. It does not meet the first policy objective.

The second policy objective that the CAA was given was

"to make effective and efficient use of existing and planned airport facilities in the UK and of available and planned airspace capacity"

If we consider the current situation—the terminal capacity being used at the three airports in the south-east, the runway capacity, and how much of the night quota is being used—we discover that: at London Heathrow, 102 per cent. of the terminal capacity, 99 per cent. of the runway capacity and 99 per cent. of the night quota is already taken up. At Gatwick, there is a similar pattern —88 per cent. of the terminal capacity, 86 per cent. of the runway capacity and 96 per cent. of the night quota are being used. But at Stansted, only 14 per cent. of the terminal capacity, 30 per cent. of the runway capacity and 10 per cent. of the night quota is being used.

The report suggests, however, that more traffic should be directed towards Heathrow. Such advice flies in the face of full terminals, full runways and a full night quota. Thus the report fails its second test—to meet the second policy objective.

The third policy objective is

"to promote competition among airlines in all markets to the benefit of users and so as to encourage a sound and competitive multi-airline industry in Britain with a variety of airlines of different characteristics serving the whole range of travellers' needs."

The report, however, suggests scrapping the rules. We must consider how that would affect the third policy objective—it would certainly not produce more slots, or lead to a bigger choice over a longer time at Heathrow. The report makes it clear that it would kill competition for Heathrow from Gatwick and Stansted. It would have exactly the opposite effect to that stated in the policy and do nothing for competition on short-haul routes. Indeed, the report spells out in words of one syllable that something else would have to happen if competition in the short-haul market were to be improved. Therefore, the report fails its third test, because it does not meet that policy objective either.

The last of the policy objectives is

"to further the contribution of civil aviation to the UK economy."

However, the report says that scrapping will not do. Paragraph 3.19 states:

"There is little evidence in terms of the wider effects on the economy as a whole . . . several foreign airlines would stand to gain . . . Much would therefore depend on the relative balance of advantage to Virgin on the one hand and to the loss to BA and the gain to these foreign new entrants on the other."

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that that is one of the most important points, because if the CAA proposals are accepted, they are likely to lead to an increase in long-haul flights into Heathrow to the disadvantage of our own flag carrier, British Airways? It would be quite wrong even to contemplate that while my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is engaged in discussions in relation to the United Airlines' application for the Pan Am slots at Heathrow.

Mr. Wilshire: That is precisely what the CAA admits in the paragraph from which I quoted, because it says that Virgin will gain, provided that another British airline lost. It says that the real gainers would be foreign airlines. We have to compare that with the stated objective of making a contribution to the United Kingdom economy. The only contribution arising from the scrapping of the rules would be to foreign airlines, their shareholders and foreign governments. I hope that I have made it clear that the CAA has failed properly to respond to any of the four policy objectives.

Another issue in relation to the policy objectives needs to be stated. There is not a word in the policy objectives or anywhere in the report about people who live near any airport. The objectives and the report do not contain a word about the social and environmental implications of scrapping rules or doing anything else. The report makes

it clear that we must consider the interests of airlines and their travellers. It is absolutely essential for the Government also to consider the interests of those who live near airports, because they have rights, too. The report is very remiss in making no reference whatever to such matters.

I readily accept that my constituents are all in favour of more choice and more competition. They would welcome better services at Heathrow and elsewhere, but not at any price. They see the scrapping of these proposals as leading to more noise, more traffic chaos on the roads near airports, more ancillary buildings such as hotels and hangars, and a greater demand for housing, of which we do not have enough at the moment. It is a one-sided bargain to do things for airlines and travellers while making life a misery for people who have to live near the airports. That is the policy context as I see it.

Given the disastrous attempt that the report has made to address that, we should look at local issues which are constituency matters for the 14 of us. They are all about creating extra pressure at Heathrow. The report admits that if its advice is accepted, pressure on Heathrow airport will increase in six ways. Airlines will fly into Heathrow for the first time. It will result in requests to transfer flights from Gatwick to Heathrow, and in little aircraft being swapped for big ones that can carry more passengers. It will result in charter flights arriving and in more cargo flights coming in and out when they feel like it, and it will produce even more pressure from business and general aviation.

Despite those six factors, nowhere in the report does the CAA make any attempt to quantify the amount of pressure that would be generated. Without the figures, it gaily goes on to propose that something should happen. Sadly, it is also beyond my personal resources to quantify the figures. The best that I have been able to do in the short time available is look at the current situation and try to draw a few tentative conclusions from it.

The current pressures at Heathrow look something like this. From the existing users who operate there within the rules, the bids for 1991 have resulted in requests for 10,000 more slots than can be accommodated. Without changing anything, 10,000 extra slots have been requested.

During peak hours, 9 am to 1 pm, Monday to Friday, there are 117 long-haul departures from Gatwick. The argument is that long-haul flights will focus on Heathrow and will transfer from Gatwick. We already have 10,000 slots being looked for which are not there and we have the prospect of up to 117 departures coming from Gatwick to Heathrow.

But what is available? The best figure that I can find for spare slots in the peak time, Monday to Friday, to put against that 117 is just nine. That is all that is available unless we take into the calculation what would become available if flights were allowed in between 5 am and 6 am in the restricted period. That would provide another 155 slots. Looking at the basic statistics, therefore, it is fairly obvious that that is the only place at which the pressure could be accommodated.

But the Government must insist on calculations of what the pressure really would be before any decisions are taken. I say that with all the feeling that I can muster. They must allay the worries of local people. First, they must allay the worries of local people about night flights. They are the thing, above all else, that disturbs people who live near airports. The problem of night flights is in a class of its own compared with all the other many troubles that we have. Day flights cause trouble, but most people who live near airports understand that their livelihood depends on day flights. It is the problem of night flights that we must address.

We need look no further than the submission made by the BAA to the CAA when it was drawing up its report to see that it is blindingly obvious that if the report was accepted the pressure would have to be relieved by more night flights. The BAA says in its document:

> "To cope with additional long-haul services, consideration will have to be given to shortening the night restrictions period by say half an hour in the morning and/or increasing the quota."

There we have it. There is the admission that that is the only way in which anything can be done to ease the pressure that would be created, and that would be a disaster for all those people living near all the airports in the south-east.

The second thing about which the Government need to reassure local people is whether more flights would produce even more of a demand for a fifth terminal at Heathrow. It is often forgotten that terminal capacity is part of the slot allocation calculation. With larger aircraft replacing smaller aircraft and extra flights, the result, as sure as day follows night, is more passengers. If the terminals are already full and there are yet more passengers, more terminals have to be built.

That will further complicate surface access, requiring more junctions on motorways such as the M25 and the M4 where there is already chaos. Somebody will have to decide on a site for a new sewage works and then somebody will have to face up to the problem of the need for more parking space. There will be greater demand for labour when there is no job pool anyway, more demand for housing when there is already insufficient near Heathrow, and all the ancillary developments, such as hotels, hangars, workshops and so on, will require land which is not readily available.

Mr. Shersby: I agree that it is vital to quantify the effects on Heathrow of the proposed abolition of the distribution rules. If that is not done, an enormous head of steam will be built up by the increased number of entries into Heathrow, for an extension of unrestricted flying hours, both morning and evening, and for terminal 5. For some time, it has almost been assumed by some of the major interests responsible for the running of the airport, as well as those who use it, that terminal 5 is almost a foregone conclusion. Not so long ago, we received assurances that a new runway would not be built.

Mr. Wilshire: I assure anyone who may be tempted to submit a planning application for a fifth terminal that it will be fought tooth and nail by a large number of people. The bad news for my hon. Friend is that if he thinks that the only problems confronting his constituents are night flights and another terminal, he should know that they also face the prospect of a third runway. Given that his constituents would live closer to it than mine, he probably has a great deal more to fear than I have.

The conclusion of one report was that there will be a need for a third runway in south-east England and a study is being undertaken to decide its location. The Government must assure people that this report will not pre-empt the study into a third runway. If one accepts the

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proposals and all the demand goes to Heathrow, it follows that the third runway will have to be located there. The Government must understand what that would involve.

The Civil Aviation Authority has said on more than one occasion that any additional runway at Heathrow would be fully utilised within five years, so we would quickly be back where we started. A third runway would also create a 50 per cent. increase in the number of flights—another 200,000 air traffic movements a year for local people to tolerate.

The construction of a fifth terminal at Heathrow would start with the demolition of two villages in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington. Two communities would be rubbed off the map. I suspect that the Department of Transport would rapidly reach the conclusion that large traffic lights would have to be erected at the M25 junction, because low-flying aircraft might risk hitting the roofs of cars on the motorway when they passed over.

A huge extension of the airport would bring with it a much greater security risk. Heathrow already has nine and a half miles of boundary fencing to guard, without another load of fencing round another runway, to the north of the existing airport. We would end up with the ludicrous situation of the world's busiest international airport having the A4 trunk road going slap through the middle of it. That would be absolute lunacy.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): My hon. Friend may recollect that when Heathrow was first planned, it was intended to close the A4 once the airport was fully developed, with the M4 taking the diverted traffic. My hon. Friend makes a good case. If he means to resist all development at Heathrow and wants the airport transferred from its present location to an alternative site, the obvious choice would be Stansted. Is my hon. Friend really suggesting that Heathrow should be totally closed, and a proper international airport offering entry into this country at a proper standard developed elsewhere in its place?

Mr. Wilshire: That is a fascinating argument. Heathrow is a high quality international airport, of which we can all be proud.

Mr. Wells: It is awful.

Mr. Wilshire: I do not consider it to be at all awful. That is a slight against my constituents and against this country's aviation industry. Heathrow is an impressive airport, which handles more traffic on an international basis than any other in the world—and it does that very well. I am not suggesting that we should rub out an entire airport. I mentioned that the proposal would rub out two villages, and my hon. Friend said that perhaps a road should be wiped out. If the airport is to be extended, why not wipe out several more villages as well?

That does not make my hon. Friend's case at all. My contention is that it has to be possible to link economic success, and the convenience of the air transport industry, with a decent lifestyle for people who live nearby. They live there out of choice, they work there, and they want the place to succeed. They just do not want their lives to be ruined into the bargain.

Mr. Stern: In no way do I disagree with my hon. Friend, who is putting an effective case on behalf of his constituents, but may I add a further frog's leg to the brew? Does he not also have to consider the desire of those travellers who choose to go to Heathrow at the moment? If they were told that they could not come to Heathrow, they might choose to go to Manchester or Bristol, but they might also choose to go to Paris or Brussels.

Mr. Wilshire: We understand that absolutely, but consideration must be given to keeping Heathrow as a hub. However, one then has to ask oneself what makes Heathrow a hub. The reason is quite simply that long-haul flights can come into Heathrow and there is an enormous choice of short-haul and domestic routes going out of Heathrow.

The report before us admits that if the proposals were accepted, short-haul and domestic flights would be pushed out of Heathrow. In fact, the proposals would go a long way towards making my hon. Friend's prediction come true, which is another reason why I am against them.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I apologise for missing the first part of my hon. Friend's speech—I shall read it with great interest—and I hope that he will excuse me if I ask a question which he may already have covered in his oration. He mentioned regional airports. Does he agree that it is essential for the Government to have a strong, inter-line system with all the regional airports in Britain? The strength of this country depends upon strong regional airports with regional airlines so that industry—whether Japanese, American or European—can be conveniently based in the regions and can centre on a hub going out into Europe and beyond?

Mr. Wilshire: How right my hon. Friend is. If the report is implemented, when he pops down to his local airport in Exeter——

Mr. Steen: Plymouth.

Mr. Wilshire: I apologise. When my hon. Friend pops down to Plymouth to get on a plane to fly to London and into Heathrow, he will suddenly discover that the flight does not go there any more. He will no longer have the choice. He will have to go somewhere peculiar and catch a train, or walk. That will be the exact opposite of the objectives stated in the report.

I think that I have probably laboured the point about the worries of people living near Heathrow for quite long enough. Time may be on our side, however, and some of my hon. Friends may wish to say a little more.

The national and international issues that we need to consider are, first, the problem of United Airlines wishing to take over Pan Am routes, and where that leaves us. Secondly, we need to consider the implications of this country making unilateral changes in aviation relations. Thirdly, we need to consider the future of Stansted. Fourthly, we need to consider what the European Community is up to in Brussels as regards wanting to get its sticky little hands on slots, and we need to consider whether or not these changes will benefit or harm British aviation generally.

Mr. Wells: Is this going to go on for another half hour?

Mr. Wilshire: If my hon. Friend would like me to take him at his word, we could go on until half past ten. Is he here just because he is stuck as a result of the snow?

Perhaps it is warmer here than it is in his flat. If that is what he would like, I will oblige him, but he may regret it by the time I suggest that we concrete over his constituency.

We must first consider the United Airlines-Pan Am route problem. The problem is that Pan Am wishes to dispose of some of its routes, but not all of Pan Am. Some of the routes are from the United States into Heathrow. United Airlines wants to take them over. But that would fall foul of the rules because United Airlines would be a new airline coming into Heathrow. That is exactly why the Government brought forward their timetable. They said, "We have a problem. We realise that the rules are difficult. Let's rush the job." Indeed, for a moment or two there was some panic that the Secretary of State would make a decision within days.

Yet, in addressing the issues, the report says that the position is an anomaly, a small problem arising from the rules, which was not envisaged when the rules were written. My experience over the years suggests that the worst possible move when faced with an anomaly is to go in for wholesale change of absolutely everything. To throw one's papers up in the air and start again because one has a small problem seems a silly way of trying to solve the issue.

The matter will not be solved by changing the traffic distribution rules because the United-Pan Am dispute raises the question of bilateral agreements. They have to be renegotiated. The British Government have tried to renegotiate them and the whole thing has come unstuck. There is no progress on the bilateral implications, so there is no urgent need to deal with the report.

Mr. Steen: I am sure that when my hon. Friend the Minister is considering the bilateral agreements he will also be aware of the six freedom uplift, with which I am sure that he is familiar. The six freedom uplift was arranged after the war when the American airlines were allowed to fly into Heathrow and have all their planes stationed there to fly off to Europe. It seems that when the Americans ask to come into Heathrow with a new airline, the Government should address themselves to the six freedom uplift. It would mean that the British and European carriers were discriminated against because the American airlines had the right to fly from America into Heathrow or Gatwick and fly on to Europe in their own planes. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should consider that point, too?

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government must take into account the knock-on implications because at every turn in the report the suggestions seem to have three, four or five disadvantages attached. My hon. Friend referred to one of the key disadvantages which must be considered.

The second international and national issue which we must address and which the Government must understand is how wrong it would be to make unilateral change when giving access to an airport. The report makes it clear that to open up London Heathrow on a free-for-all basis would be of undoubted benefit to foreign airlines. That should not come as any surprise. It is obvious.

The way in which international aviation always has worked, and I suspect always will work, is that if one gives someone a benefit one demands something in return. But the report suggests giving away a benefit without expecting anything in return. Let us test that against what happens elsewhere in the world. No other city in the world which has more than one airport allows a free-for-all into its airports. To me, the implications are straightforward. If United States airlines want free access to whichever London airport they choose, we want free access when we go to New York to either J. F. Kennedy or La Guardia, as we choose. New York would not give us such access. The same would be true of Washington. We most certainly would not be allowed into National airport in Washington. If we talked to the Japanese airlines and the Japanese Government, they would not allow us free access into either of the Tokyo airports. Yet we are told that it would be a good idea to allow Japanese airlines to come into whichever United Kingdom airport they choose, which would give them an enormous advantage. That seems crazy.

The third national issue is Stansted. A detailed reading of the report shows that the Civil Aviation Authority admits that when the rules were introduced they were a great success. They did exactly what was intended for Gatwick. In the early days, Gatwick was a small, struggling regional airport. Today, it is the world's second busiest international airport after Heathrow. The report accepts that it is a great success.

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The third busiest.

Mr. Wilshire: All right. I will settle for the third busiest —even that represents a vast improvement—but I will quarrel afterwards with anyone who disagrees with me on this point: it is still proof of how successful the rules have been.

The current position is exactly the same, except that the airport in question is Stansted instead of Gatwick. We have a third London airport with 86 per cent. spare terminal capacity, 70 per cent. spare runway capacity, and 90 per cent. of existing night quota unused. But all of that is ignored, and it is suggested that traffic should be directed to Heathrow. That is exactly the opposite of what the rules were designed to achieve; yet the case for rules remains as strong as ever.

The fourth issue which constitutes a national problem concerns the EC. The people in Brussels usually look around for things that can be seen to be of benefit to them. More often than not, such things are a great disadvantage to the nations concerned. The EC has set its sights on controlling slot allocation. At some stage we shall have to argue with Brussels about why we should keep control of the allocation of slots in this country. It seems to me that, if we are to have that argument, it would be silly to throw away the strongest bargaining card that we are ever likely to have—the rules which control who has access at the moment.

The final national issue can be stated in the form of a question: what overall harm will be done to British aviation? My earlier quotation made it clear that foreign airlines will benefit, but what will the change mean for British aviation? The report says that Virgin will benefit. It is fine that a British airline will get some benefit, but the report says that Virgin will benefit only if British Airways loses, which does not seem to do much for the overall benefit of British aviation. The report says that there will be fewer domestic flights at Heathrow. I shudder to think what British Midland will make of that. The report says that there will be less scope for regional airports and for

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the small regional airlines. Will Brymon be pleased about that? The more I look at the report, the harder it is to find benefits for British aviation. It does not encourage competition; it gives foreign airlines a walk-over. This is not liberalisation—it is a reduction of choice—and it all seems to me to add up to a very compelling case for rejecting the CAA's advice.

Nevertheless, I am a realist. Despite all the logic that we can bring to this issue, the Government may be determined to do something. If that is the case, I ought to address some issues. First, I urge the Government not to rush. There is no need for haste. The United-Pan Am situation is on the back burner. If the Government take their time, they will have an opportunity to quantify the effects of the pressure on Heathrow, and that might help them to make a better decision. If they take their time, instead of giving us four days to come up with our response, other people may have a reasonable opportunity to give a considered opinion.

Secondly, if the Government are determined to press ahead, let them not scrap the rules but modify them. There are some benefits to be derived from increasing competition and liberalisation, but the report makes it clear that there are disadvantages. It also totally overlooks the need to protect local people. The only way to block the disadvantages and to protect people living near airports is to go down the road of modification rather than that of abolition.

If the Government are determined to go ahead, how will the slots be made available if there is more liberal access to Heathrow? The report suggests that airlines might voluntarily give up some of their slots. Pigs will fly before that happens. It also suggests that it might be possible to take slots away by lottery. That is not the way to run international aviation. The slot allocation system is voluntary. We cannot order airlines to give up slots. If slots are not yielded up, airlines which seek them have a legal remedy under the operator's licence held by Heathrow Airport Ltd. It could go to the courts and force action to be taken. According to the law, the Secretary of State would then have to make regulations. If the rules were scrapped, we should end up in the Alice-in-Wonderland situation of scrapping them and then forcing ourselves to introduce new ones. Time is needed to think that through properly.

The Government should see the report for what it really is. As I said at the beginning of my speech, it is wishy-washy. It is also fatally flawed. In paragraph 4.1, the report admits that regulations are necessary. In paragraph 4.2, it admits that to scrap the rules would result in long-haul flights pushing short-haul flights out of Heathrow. The report also admits that domestic services are already under pressure and that to scrap the rules would increase that pressure. It admits that to scrap the rules would accelerate the reduction of choice at Heathrow, and new terminal facilities would be needed. Furthermore, it admits that the existing rules led to the successful development of Gatwick. The clincher for me is that paragraph 4 admits that nobody—not even those who seek access to Heathrow—agrees with the totality of the CAA's advice. It is a damning list, and it proves that the advice flies in the face of the Government's stated objectives.

When the Minister replies to the debate, I ask him to remember why the rules were introduced. They were introduced to limit pressure, which is now even worse, and to encourage the development of Gatwick and Stansted. I ask him also to remember that local people have rights. They know how good Heathrow is, but they are entitled to a decent night's sleep. How does the Minister intend to ensure that they will still get that? I hope that he will tell us that he intends to reject the CAA's advice. If he cannot say that today, I hope that he will say that he will seriously consider modifying rather than scrapping the rules. It is essential for all of us—the Minister, the Government and all right hon. and hon. Members—to think about the people who live near any airport as well as about the airlines and air travellers.

9.48 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) for his notable contribution to an outstanding Adjournment debate. This has been a very busy week for him. He, like a number of other hon. Members who represent constituencies around Heathrow, has been totally immersed in the arcane mysteries of the traffic distribution rules. Together with his colleagues, he has made strong representations about them to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State could not have been more helpful, sympathetic and prepared to listen to the arguments that we have put to him. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne has made the point well that we are debating this matter because, suddenly, something that was urgent has become extremely urgent and that is the resolution of the problems arising from the difficulties of Pan American World Airways and the wish of United Airlines to fly to Heathrow.

My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, Lord Brabazon of Tara, wrote to the Civil Aviation Authority in September 1990. He said that the Government

"believe it is right in principle for Government to intervene in the operation of the civil aviation market only when and only to the extent that circumstances make it necessary. That principle very much underpins our approach to aviation liberalisation in Europe, where the UK is continuing to play a prominent part in securing a better deal for passengers. In that context, I am conscious of the belief in some quarters that the London area traffic distribution rules are difficult to reconcile with this liberal approach."

My noble Friend did not leave the matter there. He wrote again to the Civil Aviation Authority in November last year, saying:

"There are, as you know, a number of developments occurring on the international scene, both in Europe and America, and we think it would be very helpful if we were able to consider the full picture at that time, including your advice on the future of the Traffic Distribution Rules."

It is right and proper for the Minister to make that request.

I am here representing the interests of those who live in my constituency of Uxbridge and I am sure that, if my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) had not been absent on parliamentary business, he would have been here, because a large part of the airport is in his constituency. We are concerned at the high speed with which the matter is being considered. Had it not been for the devotion to duty of my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne in producing, with some of his colleagues, an

admirable paper that we were able to put to the Secretary of State within a few days, this matter might have slipped through almost unnoticed.

I represent a constituency in the borough of Hillingdon. Hillingdon is the local authority that looks after the interests of London airport. If the pressure builds up in the way suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne——

Mr. Wilshire: Hon. Members who represent areas around Heathrow are sensitive people. To correct the record, Hillingdon looks after 80 per cent. of the airport and Spelthorne and Surrey look after the other 20 per cent.

Mr. Shersby: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I accept his division of responsibility.

The future development of the airport is important. Those who live around it believe strongly that Heathrow is vital to the interests of the nation and to their future livelihood. At the same time, they do not believe that Heathrow can be expanded indefinitely. If the proposals go through quickly and without proper consideration, it will lead to the sort of pressure described by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne.

That in turn will lead inexorably to pressure on the Government of the day for an increase in night flying, the construction of terminal 5 and, even more important from the point of view of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington and myself, the construction of a third runway, not on the present airport site but between the A4 and the M4. That would cause massive environmental damage to Sipson, Longford, Harmondsworth and West Drayton. I am here to speak for the interests of those who have as much right to be considered in relation to the rules as those who operate airlines and the passengers who fly on them from all over the world.

Mr. Wells: The constituents for whom my hon. Friend rightly speaks strongly should be knowledgeable about the original airport design. I too was brought up under the approach path to London airport's present No. 1 runway. The original design included the closure of the A4 and the construction of two further runways north of the present airport. Because of the advocacy of my hon. Friends who live in the area, that development was stopped. I put it to my hon. Friend that, unless Heathrow is prepared to expand and modernise to become the premier airport of the country, of which we can all be proud, and where passengers are properly treated—as opposed to what happens at present—it should close.

Mr. Shersby: My hon. Friend refers to an original plan for Heathrow. I was born and brought up in my constituency, and I know every inch of it. I watched Heathrow being built when I was a small boy, so he cannot tell me anything about the plans. Those plans were drawn up a long time before anyone dreamed of the volume of air traffic that we have today. Therefore, we must address the problem in the light of modern conditions. We must have regard to the possible environmental damage to a vast area around Heathrow if the matter is not dealt with properly.

Very good representations have been made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State by a number of local authorities, not least Buckinghamshire county council, which is also concerned about the flight path. I have had the opportunity briefly to discuss the matter with the Secretary of State. I want to record my thanks to him for two assurances which he gave me and other colleagues who saw him this week. He assured us that there would be no more night flights, even if they were applied for, and that there would be no increased runway alteration at Heathrow. Those are two valuable assurances. He could give those assurances without interfering in any way with his ability to consider the recommendations.

I do not want to take up any more time; my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne has deployed the arguments very well. It is vital that, as a result of the Pan Am-United difficulty, we do not rush into decisions which will tie the hands of the Secretary of State in reaching a sensible decision about any application that may be made for a fifth terminal or an additional runway.

I recall two things that happened during the past few years. I recall my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) giving an assurance that air traffic movements at Heathrow would not exceed 275,000 a year. I believe that there are now well over 300,000 movements. I also remember clear assurances being given about no further terminals, yet, listening to those who have an interest in developments at Heathrow, one would think that another terminal was a foregone conclusion.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport to take care in what he says tonight. We shall take careful note of what is on the record.

9.57 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who has done a great service to the House. I am only sorry that there are no Opposition Members present, because they would have benefited from hearing what he had to say. It is a tribute to my hon. Friends, who are greatly concerned about these matters, that there is such a large attendance on this side of the House. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for attracting so many hon. Members on this side of the House on such a bad evening.

I am glad to see the Minister on the Front Bench. When he became responsible for aviation, the national media drew attention to the fact that he loathed travelling by plane. I am told that he has been so well trained now that he cannot be kept out of the air. It is especially good that he has found time to be here to answer this debate.

I have three short but pertinent points to make, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will do his best to deal with them. First, we should do nothing that could damage our airline industry. We must do something to help it. It is going through an extremely difficult time. It is one of the greatest success stories in Europe, but is facing problems—so much so that British Airways, which was floated four years ago at, I think, £1·30 per share, has risen to 5p over the asking price in only the past few days, having reached an all-time high of £2·40. That reflects some of the difficulties that one of our major airlines is currently facing.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Mr. Steen: I was saying that, four years after flotation, shares in British Airways are today only a little higher than they were. It is understandably cutting services. Within

[Mr. Steen]

Great Britain, it has decided to stop flying to Eire, and services to Newcastle upon Tyne and elsewhere have been cut.

I give those examples to show that, if British Airways is facing difficulties, the rest of the industry is facing even greater problems. It would be seriously unwise of the Government to do anything that might cause additional difficulties to airlines even as large or prosperous as British Airways.

The airline industry at Gatwick is facing problems. Dan-Air, which has done such a great service to this country, is about to be sold off in part, and the family fortunes have disappeared overnight. That airline, which provided a wonderful charter service for passengers and pioneered the cheap holiday, is in difficulties, and Air Europe is having to refinance its activities. The Minister should be conscious of the fact that nothing should be done by our Government that would cause additional problems for our successful private enterprise airline industry.

My hon. Friend the Minister should bear in mind the fact that slots at Gatwick, which at one stage were scarcer than at Heathrow, have become increasingly available in the past year for airlines that want to fly from there. It would be a mistake for my hon. Friend to do anything that would encourage airlines to transfer to Heathrow, thereby under-utilising the infrastructure established at Gatwick in the past decade. The Government must have some regard to the fact that Gatwick has much available space and that it would be a mistake to try to cram more aircraft into Heathrow.

My second point is about regional airlines. It is good to see my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) in his place; his interest in regional airlines is well known. He and I and some other hon. Friends went to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State this morning to discuss this point. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale), who joined us this morning. My right hon. and learned Friend greeted that distinguished delegation with his customary courtesy and intellectual brightness, even at an early hour of the morning. He understood our concern in Devon and Cornwall, should the services from the west country be forced to disappear.

Brymon Airways has pioneered a first-rate service from Cornwall and Devon to Heathrow and Gatwick. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives and I were extremely troubled to learn that Brymon Airways is to discontinue its service into Gatwick in March simply because the landing charges there have become so excessive that it cannot afford to fly a 50-seater aeroplane into that airport. The charges made by the British Airports Authority to land a Dash 7—a 50-seater aeroplane—are approximately the same as those to land a jumbo with 450 seats.

I am concerned that any rearrangement of the slots or of slot negotiations that could result in regional airlines such as Brymon Airways or Manx Airlines being displaced from the major hub airports would have a serious impact on regional development. In Plymouth, there are many new industries—Japanese and American. The Harris Corporation is building a £16 million microchip factory in the South Hams. Its directors and staff often fly into Plymouth out of Heathrow, having connected from the United States. We must encourage regional airports and help them to grow. If we force regional airlines out of the market by making it so costly for them to land and to take off at the major hub routes, it will do a great disservice to the Government's whole policy of regional development and the revival of regional enterprise.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Does my hon. Friend agree that the case that he makes so eloquently on behalf of his constituents could equally be made on behalf of the whole of Cornwall? Brymon Airways is one of the most useful tools of regional policy, both in attracting inward investment to the two counties of Devon and Cornwall and in enabling existing firms, such as English China Clays, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) at the meeting this morning, to continue their business. It is important that a firm with international business should have a feed into Heathrow, and therefore a link to the international airlines.

Mr. Steen: I could not have made the point better than my hon. Friend has. Although the Secretary of State reassured us that grandfather rights at Heathrow and Gatwick would not be lost if the Civil Aviation Authority rules were implemented, the cost of landing could not necessarily be protected adequately.

Thirdly, although the Secretary of State reminded us that legislation in the 1980s protected airlines from excessive increases in landing charges, I have done some research that shows that, although the amount by which the landing charge may rise is fixed—the formula is the retail price index minus one—the formula is for the totality of all the landings, not for individual landings.

Brymon has told us that, over the past five years, its landing fees have increased by 116 per cent. in peak periods and by 134 per cent. in off-peak periods. It makes the case extremely forcefully that a Boeing 747 with 450 seats is able to absorb the £432 fee for landing far more easily than a 50-seater aeroplane. The Government must intervene so that the smaller airlines and the regional airlines are not pushed out of the major hub airports.

It is only right to give the Minister some time to reply. Having made those two points, it would be appropriate for me to sit down.

10.3 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It may be "right to give the Minister time to reply" and I shall do my utmost to co-operate in that. I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that it is right that those with constituencies near Heathrow should also have some time to discuss the distribution of London air traffic. Of course, the London distribution of air traffic interacts closely with the whole problem of aircraft noise.

As you will remember, Mr. Speaker, from when you were my Whip 20 years ago, I have been concerned then and since with this matter, which is of great concern to many of my constituents. Aircraft noise is a pestilence. It ruins people's quiet enjoyment of their homes and gardens and affects their work in offices, schools and hospitals and churches on Sundays. We had to battle 10 years ago even to get take-offs from Heathrow stopped during the two-minute silence on Remembrance Sunday.

It is not only the peak loudness of each flight, but the sheer number of flights, and through Heathrow these

amount to about 900 per day. So in peak hours they come over every two minutes and the noise of one has hardly gone before the next one comes. Of course, it is worse in summer when people are in their gardens, or at night when they want to have their windows open.

It must be said that not everyone minds about aircraft noise. Some people do not mind about it at all. But to others it is acutely annoying and in some cases it causes mental illness. People do not merely want the noise contained. They want a substantial and permanent reduction in it.

This Conservative Administration have done more than any other Government to restrain aircraft noise, but from among all the Conservative Ministers involved in this matter in the past 11 years, no one did more than my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) when he was Secretary of State for Transport. He curbed the number of night flights and his decisions were later endorsed by my right hon. Friends the Members for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson). He stopped the Heathrow-Gatwick helicopter link when the M25 was constructed and he stopped the construction of the fifth terminal at Heathrow. When, on 5 June 1985, he announced that latter decision to the House, he answered this question from me:

"Is my right hon. Friend aware that very many of the 1·75 million people living around Heathrow, who were dreading the intolerable traffic congestion and noise that would have resulted from a fifth terminal, will be immensely grateful and relieved at the decision not to build a fifth terminal and to turn down the current planning application?"

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury replied:

"I am pleased to be able to honour the Government's pledge that terminal five would not be constructed".—[*Official Report*, 5 June 1985; Vol. 80, col. 310.]

It was therefore acknowledged by the Government that there was a pledge that terminal five would not be constructed. That followed eight other statements by the Government which were quoted by Sir Humphrey Atkins in his speech on 30 January 1985, reported at columns 304 and 305 of *Hansard*.

No one should be in any doubt that it was then clearly announced by the Secretary of State that Government policy was a pledge that a fifth terminal should not be constructed and that it would be a departure from Government policy even to say that there is no definite policy today, as there was a Government pledge that it should not be built.

I hope that when my hon. Friend replies to the debate he will confirm that the current Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), will be just as robust as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury was in protecting the environment of the many hundreds of thousands of people living around Heathrow. That remains to be seen, but I felt some encouragement from the meeting yesterday set up by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who I congratulate warmly on setting up that meeting and on initiating this debate.

A word on night flights, to which the CAA report refers. There should be a complete ban on night flights, except in emergencies. It is uncivilised, intolerable and totally unacceptable that tens of thousands of people near Heathrow should be woken up at night just so that a few hundred people can get marginally cheaper holidays.

The Government stopped any increase in night flights three times running. Successive Secretaries of State for Transport have held the limit to an average of 15 flights a night in the summer season, against commercial lobbies from interested parties in aviation. However, that is not enough—night flights should be stopped completely and the night hours lengthened from the present times of 11.30 pm to 6 am, which is only six and a half hours—much less than most people need for a decent night's sleep.

Many of my constituents arrive at their offices at 9 am, in some cases 9.30 am, and may have risen at only 8 am. Others may rise at 7.30 am. It is totally wrong that the night limitation on noise should extend to only 6 am. People need at least eight hours sleep; most people need eight and a half or nine hours. The Government should insist on putting the peace, quiet and health of the people before commercial interests. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will satisfy me that the Government intend to take a fresh look at that subject.

Mr. Steen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. While speaking earlier in the Adjournment debate, I should have declared an interest. I have an interest in British Midland Airways, which is part of the Airlines of Great Britain group. Although I was not speaking on that subject, I should like to declare that interest.

10.17 pm

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): Yet again, we have witnessed a remarkable debate on, and interest in, issues relating to aviation and Heathrow and airport capacity—wider subjects than the concept outlined in the Adjournment debate. I am sure that the House is grateful for the extra time that it managed to secure to discuss what are undoubtedly important issues for many people living in the south-east, close to our major airports.

The last time that we had such a debate was some time ago. I think it was an Adjournment debate and it was initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). It was interesting and related to the Civil Aviation Authority's advice on runway capacity. I found it a fascinating debate because all my hon. Friends accepted the need for an extra runway, but none of them wanted it to be at the airport in their districts.

Tonight, in a similar way, we have witnessed the rightful concerns of Members of Parliament, faced with the problem of having a major international airport close to their constituency. As a number of my hon. Friends have acknowledged, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has held meetings with many colleagues to discuss different aspects of the subject. One meeting, at which the traffic distribution rules were discussed, was referred to by my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and for Spelthorne. A meeting this morning on regional services was headed by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). There is no doubt that the issues to which my hon. Friends referred are very much to the forefront of my right hon. and learned Friend's mind.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne and the subsequent speakers on addressing the important issue of London air traffic distribution. As the House knows, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is presently considering the advice given to him recently by the CAA on the future of the London

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

rules in CAP 578. He has said that he hopes to reach a decision soon. I should make it clear from the outset, and I am sure the House will appreciate, that it would be wrong for me to anticipate tonight the result of those decisions, comment on them or on the CAA's advice. I hope that hon. Members do not expect me to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne asked me to give him a clue, but if I did so it would suggest that I knew the answer and that my right hon. and learned Friend had made up his mind. He has not, which is one reason why I cannot give a clue as to the result. No decision has yet been taken.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend's comment that the Secretary of State's mind has not yet been made up is helpful, and I am grateful.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am glad that my hon. Friend found that comment helpful.

Tonight's debate has been longer than is normal for an Adjournment debate, and it may not be possible for me to cover all the points made so well by my hon. Friends. I shall check carefully the report of the debate and if any issues need an individual response, I shall write to my hon. Friends with a more substantive reply than I may be able to give now.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend make certain that he refers to the important question of night flights?

Mr. McLoughlin: I hope to do that, and I shall also deal with the matter of regional airports and all the other important issues that were raised.

First, I shall speak about the background to the CAA's advice. In July 1989 the CAA submitted recommendations for modifications to the present London traffic distribution rules, following a request for advice which we had made the previous year. The changes that it proposed were relatively minor, and we took the view that, rather than make these adjustments at the margins, we should wait until we had seen the authority's wider advice on long-term airport capacity and could consider the whole picture.

The CAA's more wide-ranging advice was duly submitted last July. In September my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation wrote to the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to say that, having given thought to the question of traffic distribution—including in the light of our belief that intervention in the operation of the aviation market should be kept to a minimum—we had decided to take stock of the continued need for the London rules. Accordingly, the CAA was asked to provide advice on the removal in whole or in part of the 1986 rules.

During November, the CAA carried out the consultation required by statute, and it published its advice on 22 January. After considering the various issues, the CAA advised that the balance of advantage in terms of user benefits lay with the abolition of Heathrow rule 1, which prohibits international scheduled passenger services by airlines new to Heathrow. Having taken that view, it believes that it would be logical to go on to remove Heathrow rules 2 and 3, which prohibit, respectively, whole-plane charter traffic and, unless certified by the Secretary of State, new domestic services. However, the CAA believes that the reasoning that underpins Heathrow rule 4 and Gatwick rule 1, which restrict access to those airports of business and general aviation and of all-cargo services, remains sound and that these two rules should be retained.

I shall now deal with the issue of night noise restrictions, which was raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and for Spelthorne. I know that their concern is shared by other hon. Members with constituencies in the area. The CAA noted in CAP 578 that many airlines have called for either an extension of the operating day or for only super-quiet aircraft to be allowed at night. It also noted that in the event of abolition the BAA would seek a relaxation of the night limits to allow for larger numbers of long-haul arrivals in the early morning.

The Government have always acknowledged the concerns of those living near major airports, not just in words, but in practical ways. The 1985 airports policy White Paper set out as one of our objectives the need to minimise the impact of airports on the environment generally, and our policy on night movement restrictions has served to encourage airlines to replace their noisier aircraft with quieter ones, thereby reducing noise during the day as well as at night.

I know that aircraft noise at night is a particular worry. The House will recall that we did not accept the suggestion by the CAA in 1989 that the night noise restrictions at Heathrow and Gatwick should be relaxed. That decision by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State was welcomed by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne. I assure my hon. Friend and other hon. Members with anxieties on this score that there is no change whatever in that position. We continue to believe that the present regime, which was set in 1988 and runs until 1993, represents a reasonable balance between the interests of air transport services users on the one hand, and of the environment on the other. It follows that we have no plans to relax the existing restrictions. I am glad to give that assurance to my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham, for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and for Spelthorne and to all other hon. Members who have for a long time expressed concern. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham has for a long time done a great deal to champion the cause of his constituents and has attempted to get the right balance. We must recognise the importance of a major international airport while doing our utmost to protect the rights of our constituents.

We have commissioned new research into sleep disturbance caused by aircraft. Some preliminary field work has already been carried out and there will be more extensive monitoring this year. The steering group set up to oversee this research includes representatives from each of the Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airport consultative committees, and Manchester airport is also taking part. The results of the research should be available in 1992 in time for the next review of the London airport night restrictions. There will, of course, be public consultation before new restrictions are applied.

I recognise the importance of regional airports and services. Not long ago, Birmingham airport was commended on the service it provides. I see here my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), a senior Whip, who often uses Birmingham airport. We pay tribute to it for the way in which it serves the local community. Regional airports are vital and we wish to encourage them.

More generally, various other noise abatement measures, such as noise preferential routes and the use of

quiet take-off and landing procedures, are used and will continue to be used. In particular—this is an important point—we have no plans to end the system of runway alternation that applies at Heathrow. That is another matter which has long concerned my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne. That again is an assurance which hon. Members who represent the Heathrow area will welcome.

Further development at Heathrow is obviously a great concern to all hon. Members who represent the Heathrow area. Proposals for further terminal capacity at Heathrow would need to be brought forward in the proper way and planning permission sought and I would of course expect the environmental aspect to receive close scrutiny. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham is about to write to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on that and other matters, and we await that with interest.

Similarly, I do not believe that decisions on the rules read across to the much larger question of future south-east runway capacity. That is a longer term issue directed to the year 2005 or thereabouts. Work on that is going forward separately in a group established for the purpose. That working group is looking at the wider implications of runway development at a number of locations examined last year by the CAA in air traffic control.

Several of my hon. Friends have rightly talked about domestic services at Heathrow and how they might be affected by the abolition of the rules. We are very much aware of the concern that there is on that point which has been emphasised since the publication of the CAA's advice a few weeks ago. I well remember my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) pointing out how vital the regional services are to his area, and I am glad that he had an opportunity, together with my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams, of putting it concisely to my right hon. and learned Friend only this morning.

Mr. Steen: In respect of the services from Heathrow.

Mr. McLoughlin: From Heathrow, and also into Heathrow.

We are aware of the concern that the landing charges at the main London airports might in themselves make it uneconomical to mount services on thin routes into the region. The Government are clear that the airports must not be permitted to abuse their position or unfairly to exploit their users, through their charging regime.

With that in mind, we provided in the Airports Act 1986 for the economic regulation of airports. The power contained in section 41 is of particular relevance, since it allows the CAA to take appropriate remedial action where it believes that the airport operator has adopted a trade practice or pricing policy that unreasonably discriminates against any class of user, or a particular user, of the airport. A mechanism exists for that purpose, and we shall carefully consider the information that my hon. Friend presented.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friends' comments about the possible impact that accepting the authority's advice might have on domestic services, and that issue is one to which we shall give careful thought. The House will understand that I cannot say more at this time—

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, Mr. Speaker *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 8 February 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Public Safety Information Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who are present to take part in the debate. If any hon. Member is present because he or she was not able to get home, I commiserate, but I hope that he or she will enjoy participating in the debate.

Every good text should be headed by an adage or a quote. My first is from Cicero:

"Salus populi suprema est lex"—

the safety of the people shall be the highest law. The second quote is a couplet by Charles Churchill:

"In full fair tide let information flow.
That evil is half-cured whose cause we know."

Those two quotations sum up the purpose and meaning of the Bill, so perhaps we may bear them in mind as we proceed.

Two years ago last December, there was a disaster in my constituency. I vividly recall that morning at Clapham junction, Battersea rise when we saw the carnage of a rail crash. We saw the courage of everybody involved—those who were on the trains and those who came to support and, where possible, to rescue them. We were all moved on that occasion, as we have been on other occasions. Any hon. Member who witnesses such scenes immediately feels helpless. As a constituency Member, there is precious little that one can do beyond sympathising and encouraging. After such an event, one examines whether there is any way in which one can help in future. Also, one becomes more determined to find out whether there is anything that one can do to prevent such a thing happening again. That is our constituency and democratic duty.

When we read the Hidden report, we saw that there was something that we could do and that such an event did not need to happen. That report and others have often pointed out that information has been received in the past by authorities with responsibility for venues or transportation operations when there has been a disaster, and that something could have been done if that information had been acted on. Throughout disasters one hears the cry of people whose family who went to a certain football match or travelled on a certain train—"If only we had known that the risk was there, we would not have gone that morning. We would not have let our family travel or go to that event." That cry is repeated in disaster after disaster.

Some of my constituents' relatives were killed in the King's Cross fire. I was more than happy to sponsor the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin). That Bill was too low in the ballot and it was deemed to be too complicated and in need of too much scrutiny to allow it to be passed on the nod. Although 368 Members of Parliament supported an early-day motion urging that that Bill should be given a fair passage, that was not possible. I do not complain about that. On this occasion, through the luck of the ballot, I am able to introduce a Bill which has an opportunity for such scrutiny. I hope that there will be no opposition to the Bill's proceeding to the next stage, for detailed scrutiny in Committee.

The Bill is designed to save lives, protect limbs and health and encourage the faster rectification of perceived risk. It is in the tradition of the public's right to know. I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment to the debate and advise him that all such measures have been passed during periods of Conservative government. The maiden speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was on a private Member's Bill, the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Bill, which became the 1960 Act. That measure was extended in the Local Government Act 1972, which allowed access to local authority committees. In 1984 the Government enacted the Data Protection Act.

However, alongside those Government measures, there has been a series of private Members' Bills, none of which could have been enacted without the support and acquiescence of the Government. Those Bills range from the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and the Health Service Joint Committees Consultative (Access to Information) Act 1986 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), through the Access to Personal Files Act 1987 and the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988 in the name of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). Those private Members' Bills also include the Environment and Safety Information Act 1988 in the name of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the Community Health Councils (Access to Information) Act 1988 in the name of the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds). Each of those measures succeeded under this Government because they were simple, straightforward and deliberately limited in scope. They coped with proven difficulties and provided a simple solution. My Bill is in that tradition. It is designed to be limited and to provide a simple solution to proven problems and difficulties.

Alas, no measure of mine or of any other hon. Member can prevent disasters. Sadly, disasters will always happen because of human frailty and error, sometimes because of mechanical failure and sometimes, alas, because of malicious acts by individuals. We cannot prevent disasters, but we can make them less likely to happen. We can do that if we make perceived risks public.

I want to thank people who helped me produce the Bill. In particular, I thank the community rights project and its officer Rachel Pitkeathley who helped me to draft this Bill. The community rights project helped me with my earlier attempt and I believe that we have refined the principle considerably into a measure that is acceptable to just about everyone to whom I have spoken.

The community rights project was formed in 1983 to assist Parliament and local government to provide the

[Mr. John Bowis]

public with sensible access to local and public authorities. My Bill is a further step in its campaign and I salute the project and its efforts.

I want particularly to thank the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), his colleagues and officials at the Department of Employment and the officials in the Health and Safety Executive. They went to extraordinary lengths with great patience and perseverence to ensure that I understood their concerns about the Bill and together we have drafted and redrafted the Bill to meet those concerns.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will accept that I have met the problems that he raised about the Bill. He also helped me to identify problems that other Departments might have with the Bill. That has enabled me to talk to other Ministers and Departments. In each and every case where I have spoken to Ministers and their officials, I have been able to satisfy them. I have been able to do that because the perceived problems were based on misconceptions about the Bill. There may have been perfectly valid reasons for those misconceptions because in some cases officials examined my earlier Bill and assumed that I was trying to do the same thing in the same way, or they were not aware of amendments that I had incorporated in this Bill or of amendments that I intend to bring forward in Standing Committee.

All the Departments have been helpful and I am not aware of any Minister who has found difficulty with the Bill once the details and sequences were explained. Problems such as the cost to local government have been eliminated through the removal of part of the sequence that would have involved local government in operating the Act. Local government's only role now is to provide information to the public on request. I have been told that local government does not believe that that will have any staffing or additional cost implications. If local government is a safety authority, it has a role but that is separate and involves seeking and identifying risks.

There were also problems about costs to industry. The only cost to industry under the Bill would be the cost of correcting things that industry should have put right anyway to protect the public.

Mr. John Ward (Poole): A number of my constituents suffered bereavement in the Clapham rail disaster which also left some of my constituents seriously injured. The relatives and friends of those people have asked me to be present today to support the Bill. However, there is a difference between the Bradford fire, where things were known in advance, and the Clapham disaster. Can my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) assure me that in the Clapham case my constituents would have been able to receive a warning, under this Bill, of the potential dangers which were all too real in the event?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend represents families of people who suffered bereavement and injury on that dreadful occasion. I have received messages of support from many hon. Members who have experience of people who have been involved in disasters elsewhere in the country.

The simple answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) is that there are some disasters for which one can identify how my Bill would have been triggered immediately and directly. For other disasters, there is the potential for it to have been triggered indirectly. The Clapham junction disaster was one of those disasters where it would have been triggered indirectly. It would have been possible for British Rail employees or anyone else who knew of the warnings that had been received to draw them to the attention of the railway inspectorate or any other safety authority which might be involved. The safety authority would have investigated the representations and the procedures in my Bill would then have operated. It would have been an indirect procedure, not a direct one.

I am also grateful to the British Safety Council and its assistance in drafting the Bill and its constant support. I thank also the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and others, including the National Consumer Council for England, Wales and Scotland, and the Consumers Association. The Association of British Insurers has been helpful, as has the civil protection co-ordination group. I am particularly grateful to Sir David Napley who came forward with some ideas which I have mostly been able to incorporate. I am also grateful to the Public Bill Office for its patience in helping to draft and redraft my Bill to get it right.

I am also grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House. I welcome the presence of the hon. Members for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). My Bill is an all-party measure and it has received tremendous support from colleagues on both sides of the House. Not one hon. Member has said, "This is a measure I wish to oppose." Perhaps above all one should remember and pay tribute to the group that comes together under the newly formed organisation, Disaster Action, which has given such inspiration and support to the Bill. It is a compassionate support. The group is made up of families of victims and the survivors of various incidents and disasters. I pay tribute to them because their first instinct must be one of great sorrow. If one has lost someone in such a disaster, that sorrow can develop into simple anger that the disaster happened and could happen again. Those people have formed groups to help each other by talking about the incident and helping families through the trauma. Above all, they have been determined that from the lessons of the disaster which affected them they will formulate proposals to help others.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I, too, had many constituents who were killed in the Clapham rail disaster. Several of the relatives have written to me to say how grateful they were to my hon. Friend for introducing the Bill.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and he and I are grateful for their support and guidance.

I have had many letters on this matter. I draw the attention of the House to two that sum up the views. The first is from someone who was involved, as the House will hear, in a disaster. It says:

"On 12 December 1988, I was hauled out of the crashed train outside Clapham Junction with a fractured spine. Fortunately I survived but 35 fellow passengers were killed. At the subsequent inquiry it became apparent that similar faulty wiring, which had caused the crash, had been identified as a hazard on five previous occasions. It was only because of this inquiry that these previous 'wrong side' failures became known.

I feel sure that, if this information had been made readily available to the public, the press and particularly to British Rail passengers, the pressure for remedial action would have proved irresistable . . . I believe that this straight-forward measure will allow the public rightful access to such information and increase pressure for preventative action to be taken on safety hazards, which in the specific circumstances of the Clapham train disaster, might have saved the lives of 35 people."

That is from one of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Poole. It explains how in that instance the Bill would have helped.

The second letter is from Mr. Ronnie Farley, former leader of Bradford city council, who wrote to me:

"On 18th July 1984, when I was Leader of this Council, we received a letter . . . concerning the Bradford F.C. ground, which included a report with the words, 'the timber construction is a fire hazard and in particular there is a build-up of combustible materials in the voids beneath the seats . . .'

This information never reached the public or the elected Members, as there was no legal requirement for it to do so. No-one deliberately suppressed it—an error of judgment was, however, clearly made. Had the Public Safety Information Bill been law, the letter would have been made public and the matter would have been discussed in public at the next meeting of the relative Council Committee. . . . the public gallery would have been packed; the story would have been front page news in our local papers.

In these circumstances I can not conceive it possible that no remedial action would have been taken, in which case the fire would not have happened and people would be alive today . . . I personally knew people who went to the ground in ignorance of the dangers and died in the fire."

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Is my hon. Friend aware that councillor Farley was instrumental in helping the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 through this place. The Act requires that when—to take the example that my hon. Friend gave—information comes before a committee it is made available. But if there is no reason or need for the matter to come before a committee, my hon. Friend is absolutely right that the matter remains in confidence. That is why my hon. Friend rightly seeks to change the law today.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right. Happily, Mr. Farley has confirmed that Bradford council now follows as closely as possible the procedures proposed in my Bill. But Bradford was a case where there was a specific warning to which the Bill would apply. Lives could have been saved. Sometimes we can identify a specific warning. Even though the warning was not deemed sufficiently substantial to close the ground, it was much stronger than an improvement order. However, in cases that my hon. Friends have identified, one must consider the future in hypothetical terms. No one could expect me to say whether my Bill would apply in a certain circumstance. For that reason, although I can look back and give examples of where my Bill would have applied, it would be wrong and absurd to seek to identify specifically whether my Bill would apply on any possible future occasion. That is why the Bill gives great discretion to the health or safety authority. That must be the right way of achieving what we seek.

We know that in the case of the King's Cross fire, warnings were given. There were 46 escalator fires between 1945 and 1988 and reports were received from the fire brigade, the police and the fire prevention committee. Following the Oxford Circus fire in November 1984, the fire safety task force was set up but no report had been published by the time of the King's Cross fire in 1987.

The report of Desmond Fennel said:

"I view with dismay, the suggestion that information gained by a statutory authority, which has a bearing on the safety of the public using a system for mass transportation, should not be made publicly available. The travelling public have a right to know about the safety arrangements made by transport operators and the safety of places in which they habitually gather."

That could not be clearer, but there will always be cases where individuals could take action—perhaps, to take the Zeebrugge case—the captain of a ferry. If he previously spotted that there was a gap in the safety procedures because there were no lights on the bridge to identify whether the bow doors were closed, he could make sure that a procedure was implemented. The Zeebrugge disaster took place on 6 March 1987. Two years later, on 26 March 1989, *The Sunday Times* reported that 12 ferries were operating passenger and freight services from British ports but failing to comply with the safety standards adopted after the Zeebrugge disaster. The Government safety check on six ferries showed that they could not be brought up to standard. Six ferries failed the test, but could be modified. Those were only the important ones. The officials said that they had not said that the boats must be made to comply by a certain date. They had left it to the owners to bring them up to standard as soon as they could. That may have been sufficient legally, but it was not sufficient for the passengers of those ferries. Passengers should have been warned that the measures identified in the report on the Zeebrugge disaster had not been implemented on the ferries and so they travelled at their own risk.

Having said that, I make it clear that my Bill specifically requires the operators and occupiers to remain responsible to the public. The Bill does not remove any form of public liability. The Clapham tragedy, to which I have inevitably referred many times, led to the Hidden report which showed that there had been five previous similar incidents of faulty wiring, as the letter that I quoted shows. Hidden said that the result of those previous reports was simply "a flurry of paperwork . . . which provided important information, but on a very limited circulation . . . those lessons should have been learned and had that happened, there would have been no accident at Clapham Junction on 12 December 1988".

In other words, if the public and the press had known, Parliament would have known. Pressure would have been put on and there would have been questions in the House to the Secretary of State for Transport so matters would have been put right before that occasion.

The Bill does not deal simply with major disasters; it covers the smaller incidents and tragedies as well. We have evidence of problems with fire escapes in residential homes, with lifts in nursing homes and with security at zoos. The problems do not have to result in death; they can be a health hazard as well as a safety hazard.

I want to draw the attention of the House to a report that has recently been highlighted. It was given to British Rail in 1957 and pointed out that the habit of flushing train loos on to the track was a health hazard which could lead to dangers to passengers, to people living alongside the track and to railway workers. That has been amply underlined recently in a television programme in which some of the railway workers were interviewed about the risks that they took. The risks were identified as typhoid, dysentery, hepatitis and tetanus. I suspect that one might now have to add AIDS. Yet that report was kept secret for 34 years after it had been received. Nothing has been done

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and 80 per cent. of trains that have lavatories still travel without the sealed containers that could be emptied at depots. That is a health hazard which the public would probably think was unacceptable. If they had known about it at the time of the report, we should have had 30 years of campaigning by this place, as well as outside, to put matters right.

The Bill has a simple sequence and it has been made simpler thanks to discussions with my hon. Friend the Minister and with others to take out some of the chain of command. A ministerial colleague said to me that the Bill was in danger of being like "the king told the queen and the queen told the dairymaid". I accept that—although by the time he told me, we had removed some of the sequence.

The sequence now is simply that the safety authority —the statutory authority—identifies a risk that it deems to be substantial. It gives a warning to the occupier or to the operator and at the same time issues a notice to that occupier or operator which has to be put on public view at the point of access to the premises. At the same time, it provides the local authority with a copy of the full warning and the local authority, through its environmental safety office, makes that available to the public on request. The notice remains there and it is up to the public, the press, Parliament and local councillors to take it further and to put the pressure on. The next step is that when the risk is deemed to have been removed, the authority permits the notice to be taken down. Nothing exempts the occupier from public liability.

I have already mentioned some drafting amendments.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): I notice that clause 1 applies to "any means of transport". Does my hon. Friend intend that that should apply to aircraft? Presumably they are movable structures within the meaning of the Bill. If my hon. Friend does intend that, will he tell us a little about how he thinks that it would help air safety?

Mr. Bowis: The Bill could apply to any form of transport to which the public are admitted. It would not cover the private vehicle or the private aeroplane. It would not override any existing safety legislation. I am about to deal with a change to the Bill that may help my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground). He may be thinking of a case in which the Bill which would not work and in such a case it would not apply. If safety legislation already covers the operation of an aircraft or of an airport, the Bill would not undermine that. The only thing that the Bill can do is to provide the safety authority with a measure short of closing down the airport or taking the aeroplane off the runway. The decision will have to be made as to whether a case is severe enough for existing legislation to apply or whether the Bill should apply. That is not my judgment, or the judgment of legislation—it will be the judgment of the safety authority concerned.

I wish to deal now with the changes made to the Bill, which may help my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston. We originally thought that we should list all the safety authorities, and the Acts under which they operated, to which the measure would apply. In all humility, I thought that I was asking too much of myself. We decided to include exemptions and we exempted matters of terrorism and of national security. That applies considerably to airports and to flights.

However, we had discussions with officials at the Department of Employment and they offered—I checked with them yesterday and they are still offering—to come forward before the Committee stage with a list of all the safety authorities that they think would operate under the Bill and of all the Acts under which they would be operating. The advantage of that is that it would also provide for another gap in the Bill—the appeal procedure, which I acknowledge should be included. However, I was loth to include a great new paraphernalia of appeals procedures, and the relevant Acts already have their own appeals procedures. I decided that the measure should follow that route without adding to the legal complexity of the process. I hope that that will answer the point raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): My hon. Friend referred to the small extent to which the Secretary of State may exempt matters. Would it be preferable for the Secretary of State to be able to order that certain types of premises would not be subject to the Bill? My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) asked whether aeroplanes would be subject to the Bill. I suspect that there might be some difficulty with aeroplanes which are registered in other countries and fly to this country only occasionally.

Mr. Bowis: We propose to remove clause 1(4). We propose to take out the whole business of exemptions by including the positive requirement to include the areas that the Bill would cover.

The other changes are comparatively minor. Through a typographical error, we missed out the London boroughs when we referred to England and Wales in clause 2(2). That should also apply to the London borough councils. We did not seek to exempt them. Even more staggeringly —I take all the blame for this—I missed out two important local authorities: the sub-treasurer of the Inner Temple and the under-treasurer of the Middle Temple. I hope that the House will forgive me.

We intend to delete clause 2(3) because it would be unnecessary. It is clear from what I have already said that under clause 2(5) the public safety officer would not have to serve the written warning; the local authority, as the safety authority, would issue that notice. That change is to be made in response to helpful suggestions from the Department of Employment and its officials, and I happily concur with that. It meets the arguments about "the king asked the queen and the queen asked the dairymaid".

My final concession is a sad one. I had thought that I could go to the ramparts to defend the imperial system, but I am told that it is not permitted and that I must go metric. Thus, in clause 2(6), the term 2 ft by 1½ ft is no longer allowed and the Bill must use metric terms, such as a fraction of something, times something. I regret that, but such is progress.

The Bill's merits are that it is flexible and allows a degree of discretion on the definition of "substantial." We shall have the opportunity to discuss that word in Committee, but discretion rightly exists for the safety authority. It will provide the safety authorities with an

additional weapon in their battle to protect the public. I hope that the Bill is sensible in what it excludes and includes.

The Bill is certainly not costly—any costs incurred will be negligible. Local authorities will acknowledge that, in terms of their role of providing information to the public, as they do constantly, the Bill will not require them to make extra provision. The cost to the occupiers will simply be the cost of putting risks right. The safety authorities have already said that they are willing to meet any necessary costs, but nobody has approached me to say that there will be significant additional costs in policing by the safety authorities.

To say that the Bill will have no cost implications would be absurd. There will be some costs in sending out notices and, to a greater extent, in checking existing risks. However, I invite any hon. Member or right hon. Member who says that the cost will be too high to remember the Clapham junction crash and the damage to individuals' lives that it caused. There was a cost in lives and all the costs of a disaster. There was a cost to the rolling stock, the track and the disruption of the railways. There was a cost to the emergency services—the police, and fire brigade and the ambulance service—and to the local authority services, which attended without hesitation, from early in the morning until several days later, putting right the area affected. There were costs to the medical services—the nurses, the doctors, the helicopter flights and the blood transfusion service.

Furthermore, there were costs to the bereaved families and the expense of insurance compensation. Thank God that British Rail immediately admitted liability and agreed to pay up. There was the additional expense of counselling the bereaved and those people traumatised by sights that most of us would wish never to see. All those costs are enormous, although I doubt whether they have ever been quantified. Any expenses that the Bill might involve therefore pale into insignificance beside the cost in individual lives and the financial price of a disaster. I hope that I have put any worries about cost into context.

I believe that the measure will be effective, whether modestly or dramatically. The Bradford disaster shows that it will work and the Clapham junction disaster shows that it could work. There are many other occasions when we think that it might work. The Bill will succeed even if it is never used, because the pressure of having the provisions on the statute book will encourage more people to remove risks to members of the public. I refer to the maiden speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley when promoting her Public Bodies (Admission of the Press to Meetings) Bill. She quoted from the Franks committee report, which stated:

"Publicity is the greatest and most effective check against any arbitrary action,"

and said:

"That is one of the fundamental rights of the subject."

She later said:

"the paramount function of this distinguished House is to safeguard civil liberties rather than to think that administrative convenience should take first place in law."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1960; Vol. 616, c. 1351-57.]

If the House will not listen to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley, perhaps it will listen to the Health and Safety Commission, the authority set up by the Government to monitor the situation in relation to work, information and risks. Its 1985 policy statement on access to health and safety information by members of the public states:

"The public should be in a position to understand the nature and extent of important hazards, and where their own immediate safety or health could be at risk, should be in possession of information enabling them to understand their position."

That is what the Bill is about.

I shall quote Dr. Johnson, as one perhaps always should, who in his common-sense way said:

"About things on which the public thinks long, it commonly attains to think right."

The public have thought long about this subject, and have had many reminders over the years as to why they should think long and hard about what is necessary. I believe that the public have come to the conclusion that they should have their right to know extended. The public are right, and I hope and believe that the House will concur.

10.17 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Of course the public are right and, of course, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) is right, as are the purposes of the Bill. As I understand it, he wishes to provide a sort of safety ombudsman with statutory authority who, having looked at an application, can draw it to the attention of councillors, Members of Parliament or the respective statutory authorities, including the Health and Safety Executive, the railway inspectorate, the mines inspectorate and the Department of Transport.

However, I have less faith than the hon. Member for Battersea in Finchley Central methods, because they do not always work—much as I support the Bill's purposes and the establishment of a national safety ombudsman. In my experience, when a Member of Parliament, let alone a councillor, raises such matters, the reaction of officials, including Her Majesty's Government, is not the desired one.

The Zeebrugge, Piper Alpha, King's Cross, Marchioness and Bradford incidents all have a set of features in common: the neglect or omission of factors that, in retrospect, appear more or less common sense. Those elements include extra equipment or even seemingly small acts such as brushing up the rubbish, routines, keeping visible standards, making checks, agreeing and carrying out drills and having bow doors closed.

Sometimes people chafe against the drills and difficult regulations introduced in the services. However, we all know that they allow for checking that otherwise might not take place.

The hon. Member for Battersea said that there was waste and cost—of course there is. Where cost to property is involved, the insurance markets can weigh the risk of hazards and require threshold standards to be built into the system. But, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, we are primarily concerned with loss of life and damage and injury to families, which I agree cannot be quantified.

I shall give examples of my activities during the past few years involving risks and hazards in London, above the ground and underground. The best example is that of Newham way, the A13, in London. It is one of the busiest dual carriageways in the country and includes a reserve bus lane that has to cross at right angles to enter the traffic stream. I wrote to the Department of Transport 10 or 15 years ago asking for a bus-activated light signal, because the danger of a lorry full of girders of 20 tonnes or more

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smashing at right angles into the side of a bus was horrific, and could happen. I am sorry that the then Minister, one of my hon. Friends—it was that long ago—wrote back to say that my proposal was not cost effective. I wrote back and said that, if an accident took place at the spot I would send the Minister's letter to the coroner. He is no longer a Member of this House; indeed, he is dead now, so I can mention his name—Ken Marks. He had a high reputation in the House and he was possessed of sufficient knowledge, humanity and common sense to change his mind. The bus crossing that is there now, for which all busmen and passengers bless Ken Marks, is an example of what I am driving at. However, I fear that the change of heart was due primarily to anxiety about the decision coming to light in a spectacular way in a coroner's court or at a subsequent inquiry.

There are particular hazards in London due to the onward march of techniques—in many respects, they make life easier, but they increase hazards at the same time. Clapham junction is a good example. The hon. Member for Battersea praised the ambulance services. I submitted a petition from the ambulance personnel of London a few Fridays ago, to the effect that the underlying causes of the unhappy dispute of a few months ago have not been dealt with and that the standards of ambulance response time in London are still declining. I received a written answer the other day claiming that the Orcon standard response time has increased by one minute, due to the increased density of traffic. That answer from the Department of Health was unworthy of any Government. If the density of traffic increases, thereby preventing ambulances from getting through, the number of ambulances should increase correspondingly, although not necessarily pro rata.

The hon. Member for Battersea talked about Clapham, and much of what he said was true. But we all know that the difficulties with the signal wires arose because the man concerned had been working overtime for a long time because of a great shortage of staff. I have been told, although I do not allege, that changed arrangements for British Telecom wages, willed upon the company by the Government and by this House, has an effect on the availability of skilled staff in British Rail.

In any event, I wonder whether, even if someone had written to the safety officer pointing out that people were working overtime and that not enough men were dealing with the signals, any action would have been taken. We can imagine the sort of answer that a Minister would have given: "British Rail is doing all it can to recruit more staff." We know the sort of jargon in which Whitehall couches these answers—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) may think that I am being a little hard, but he has not heard the end of my speech yet.

In the south-east of England, we have one of the most complex commuter rail transport networks in the world, unique for social and historical reasons. The frequency of junctions, the shortness of signal sections, the speed and the braking of trains and the reactions required of drivers are all unique. Until fairly recently, we had been proud of that record, but for reasons that we all know, it is getting a little tarnished now.

Some time ago, I pointed out to the former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), that drivers on Southern region were retiring before retiring age, and I asked him why. That is the sort of issue that the safety officer appointed under this Bill would investigate, but it should be investigated now as well. The buffer stop crash and the problem with observation of signals at Cannon Street and Purley were connected with driver morale—and it is particularly strange that, at least until a year ago, these drivers were retiring early.

Now, to make matters worse, British Rail proposes to take guards off the trains on Southern region and on inner networks. That is a retrograde step because it must, by definition, increase the hazards to passengers on this unique network. The new safety equipment will cost a great deal, but we must also remember the importance at Clapham, for instance, of the fact that a guard went back and stopped a third train from crashing into the first two. Guards are there to protect passengers, and station staff are disappearing, so guards' presence on trains is all important.

British Rail is doing this with the connivance of the Government—some would say, as a result of certain requests and regulations that are still in the air. I do not want to make this debate too partisan, but these facts are common knowledge and they may have knock-on-effects —just as the knock-on effects of the market for telecommunications engineers were important in my previous example. I hope that, as a result of my speech today, British Rail will think again about its programme of taking guards off trains on Southern region; and I hope that every constituent of Conservative Members who uses these trains will write to British Rail to say that they agree with me.

So far I have discussed a plan that has not been implemented yet, but what has happened with London Underground is even worse. Two or three years ago I read with consternation that London Underground planned to take guards off deep level tubes. There is a case—although I do not agree with it—for taking guards off the Circle, Metropolitan and District surface lines. Even that would increase hazards, but taking them off deep level tubes would be a very different matter. In any case, I wrote to the then chairman of London Underground Ltd. and protested, and I made my views public in my local paper too. In short, I acted exactly as the hon. Member for Battersea suggested that we should, and no doubt as his safety officer would.

The response from London Underground was negative. I asked whether it had worked out the cost of putting on guards for an underground section only. Again the answer was no. I asked about the ridiculous idea of evacuating trains by the method known as leapfroging—a mind-boggling process. I was told that the inspectorate was happy with that. I do not think that that is true, but the Department said it was.

A letter appeared in *The Guardian*—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry that the Minister finds that a subject for mirth——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): *The Guardian* is a subject for mirth.

Mr. Spearing: In this case, *The Guardian* was guarding the lives of the people of London, as its name suggests. A

driver on the Piccadilly line protested at this practice and said that there would be a disaster sooner or later, and that if there was not, it would be no thanks to those who had taken this decision——

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that some of the drivers' own practices are even more dangerous? Does he recall the practice known as a "home run" whereby a driver who has completed the outward journey and should then travel back as a passenger agrees to take over the rota of a driver who should be doing a U-run, so that the incoming driver can go home? Is that not frightfully dangerous, putting as it does enormous strain on drivers who have already completed a rota and is it not far more dangerous than what the hon. Gentleman describes?

Secondly, does the hon. Gentleman agree that a much greater contribution to safety is being made by the huge investment going into new signals equipment, which has been neglected by successive Administrations over many years but which is now being effected by the Government?

Mr. Spearing: I have not often experienced such an intervention. I am trying to make a speech that could save 300 to 400 lives by removing some of the existing hazards. The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood my point. Of course such irregularities, such breaking of the rules for a degree of satisfaction that we can all understand, is wrong. How often has the hon. Gentleman gone to the Whips and asked to be allowed to leave quickly? That is human nature.

Despite my requests and the clear increase in hazards facing people on the deep underground lines, London Underground Ltd. and other people have agreed that matters should be regularised. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) has not distinguished between a deliberate breaking of the rules and regulations that I outlined and the deliberate lowering of standards and the increase of hazards to save a marginal amount. London Underground, with the apparent connivance of the rule safety inspectors—with whom I disagree—is doing that.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport at that time, the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), some of whose constituents no doubt travel on the Piccadilly line. I had a reply from a junior Minister, saying that he saw no reason to intervene. I hoped that it would not be necessary to forward that letter to a disaster inquiry.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman spoke about drivers leapfrogging from one train to the next. That must be put in context because it would happen very rarely. Is the hon. Gentleman aware of its ever happening?

Mr. Spearing: I think that the hon. Gentleman is in the legal profession. Mathematical chance is surely irrelevant. The question is whether it is right practice. Of course the chances of disasters are millions or thousands to one, and can be calculated. All the disasters about which I spoke, including the one at Zeebrugge, occurred because of a combination of circumstances which one hopes and believes could never happen. When they do happen, what is the result? The point is not merely about leapfrogging but about such things as fire or a power failure. There is a procedure for conducting passengers away from a train when the driver dies. As I read the rule book, a driver leaving the train from the back puts a passenger in charge of the train behind. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that?

Mr. Arbuthnot: In the context of that sort of event, I do, because it is a sensible procedure. I did not mean that the chances of a disaster were 1 million to one, but that those were the odds that applied to leapfrogging. The disaster would happen only after that.

Mr. Spearing: So far we have not had a disaster on the Piccadilly line, and I hope that we do not. I mentioned the leapfrogging procedure as one of the hazards inherent in this regulation, but I also mentioned others.

About an hour and a half ago, there was an announcement at South Kensington station to say that the fire brigade had been called and that there was an emergency on the Piccadilly line. I do not know what sort of emergency it was. It could have been some horrible potential incident between South Kensington and Knightsbridge, but it is more likely that it has been avoided purely by chance.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was a Minister, he had second thoughts. I hope that the present Ministers in the Department of Transport will have second thoughts about operator-only trains on the deep lines of the underground and about increasing risks to passengers by removing guards from Southern region. Some people have said—this is not an accusation—that, in the search for reduced costs, the Government and the railway operators are indirectly increasing the hazards for passengers by bribing the staff. If that is untrue, the Government must say so.

10.35 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I entirely agree with much of the speech by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). However, it is necessary to do our best to save money on the operation of the underground, so that the savings can be put into improved safety procedures and operating practices. The hon. Gentleman and I may disagree on some points of detail, but there are many matters on which we agree.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on doing so well in the ballot, although I am not sure whether that is a matter for congratulate or commiseration. I also congratulate him on choosing an extremely important subject. I apologise to him and to the House as I shall not be able to be here at the close of the debate due to a constituency engagement.

I am one of the Bill's sponsors, although I became conscious of that only at a late stage when my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea wrote to me telling me so. I do not remember agreeing to be a sponsor. I immediately wrote to my hon. Friend saying that I did not remember, but he assured me that I had agreed and, of course, I accepted that. In view of my obvious forgetfulness I can only take comfort from the words of somebody called Elbert Hubbard who said:

"A retentive memory may be a good thing, but the ability to forget is the true token of greatness".

On that basis, I am very great indeed.

The Bill is introduced against a background of a decade of disasters—from King's Cross to Purley, from Bradford to Hillsborough. The experience of my hon. Friend the

[Mr. James Arbuthnot]

Member for Battersea in the Clapham rail crash will always be in his memory, just as it will always be in the memory of the victims of that crash. I suspect that some people listening to this debate were involved in one way or another in that crash.

After each such tragedy the natural reaction is to ask why on earth it happened and whether it could possibly have been prevented. Some accidents are acts of God which cannot be prevented and nothing that we can do will stop them, although we are getting better all the time at preventing disasters such as floods and at minimising the effects of events that were once cataclysmic. However, there is a limit to what humans can do and we should be careful not to be so arrogant as to think that we can abolish all risk or danger, because we cannot. In many cases, neither would we want to, and the Bill makes no attempt or pretence at that.

Having thought about whether a disaster could have been prevented, the next question is whether it should have been prevented. While it is easy to be wise after the event, it is rather harder to be wise beforehand. We are all human and subject to human error, and all mechanisms are subject to mechanical failure. One of the characteristics of being human is that we are able to learn from our mistakes. The comment that we learn history but that we learn nothing from history was clever but untrue. Therefore, we should try to ensure that, when there are lessons to be learnt and actions to be taken, we should learn those lessons and take that action. We shall sometimes fail, because as humans we frequently fail, but we should try to succeed.

We already have a great deal of legislation aimed at ensuring that we learn those lessons. The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, for example, imposes quite heavy burdens on employers and on the self-employed, requiring them to ensure that the public are not exposed to safety risks. Yet, despite that legislation, disasters happen. Some disasters appear to be, if not exactly carbon copies of earlier disasters, sufficiently similar as to be ones which with a little foresight could have been avoided. Those are the disasters that not only could have been but should have been prevented.

The Bill seeks to make disasters of that type less likely in two ways. First, substantial threats of danger to the public will, in theory, be made known to the public so that they will have the informed knowledge with which they can decide whether to go to places where there are risks. Secondly, the very fact that, in theory, the public will have been informed of those threats and danger will encourage or pressure the owners of premises to act more quickly than they might otherwise have done to reduce the dangers.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea is correct in his belief that those two aims will be achieved if the Bill becomes law. I have questions about both those aims, questions on which I shall touch briefly so as to have my reservations allayed by my hon. Friend in due course. As regards the first intended effect of the Bill—improving the information available to people—there seems to me to be a risk that the Bill as drafted will mean that the statutory authorities that have to be involved in the procedure might well decide to take great care not to determine that there is a substantial threat of danger to the health or safety of the public, as any such determination would bring the authority extra work that it might not be able to afford to carry out.

Mr. Bowis: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point, but it is a reflection on the integrity of the safety authorities. I do not believe that they would act in that disreputable way. Moreover, if they did and it was shown after a disaster that they had not taken action under the provisions of what I hope will become an Act, they would be open to severe criticism. I believe that they will be as nervous of that as of any extra work which might flow from these provisions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am not sure that I would describe that as a disreputable way to act. Statutory authorities would have to make decisions based on the balance of priorities, and the finance avaiable to them would have to be one of those considerations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I do not have a direct answer, but this may help to illuminate the subject. If there were a transport casualty reduction executive, it might say that, as the 8 per cent. of car crashes caused by mechanical faults get all the publicity at coroners' inquests, it should spend its time trying to work on that minority cause rather than dealing with the majority—95 per cent.—cause of accidents, which is human error. If one got defensive health and safety executive type work, one would be deliberately getting the experts to kill more people rather than save more people. That is one of the problems of working on the publicity approach. I have some things to say later on, but that may help my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) by leaving them sitting on the same shelf.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I was trying not to end up on the shelf. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for clearing that up, at least to some extent. I know that my hon. Friend the Member of Battersea has the support of 200 or more local authorities and, with that support, my fears about the reaction to the Bill may be over-cynical. Nevertheless, I raise the point as a possible reaction to the Bill.

If my hon. Friend is right to say that warnings would be served in any event, there is then the possibility—in many cases it would be a probability—that if the notices were put up at the entrances of football grounds, nobody would read them. Some people get tired of seeing notices at the entrances to public places. Nobody ever reads the byelaws of parks or those put up at the entrance to amusement parks. It is possible to have a surfeit of safety sermons. It might even be counter-productive to have too much preaching about safety. However, the very fact of notices gives rise to the second operation of the Bill—putting pressure on the owners.

The provisions in the Bill for a register that would be open to the public are a little heavy handed because, as I understand it, there are registers of enforcement action already available under the Environment and Safety Information Act 1988. I have been told, and I am not surprised, that few people read them. They are hardly the most riveting of reading.

Mr. Bowis: I am sorry to keep interrupting my hon. Friend, but he has courteously explained that he will not be here for my winding-up speech and I should like to answer his points now. The safety notices may not be read

by everybody, but they would be noticed by local journalists, so the case would be raised in the right places. The problem with existing regulations requiring registers to be held by local authorities is that nobody knows that they are there. The Bill, if enacted, would trigger the following sequence: the public would be warned, the press would notice, they would investigate at the environmental safety office and the matter would become public.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Bill operates in two ways. First, notices are put up so that people will read them; secondly, pressure is put on owners because the newspapers will ensure publicity. I am suggesting that the first way will not be so effective as the second. For example, if there is a notice at the entrance to a football match, one of the last things that a man who has paid a day's wages for his ticket and has queued for hours to get to his place will do is to read the notice and decide to turn round and go home because he has seen that there is combustible rubbish under the north stairs. Most British people take the view that accidents happen not to them but to somebody else. Experience tells them that accidents always happen to someone else—until a disaster actually involves them. Nevertheless, if notices had to be displayed at the entrance to football grounds, for example, at least the public would have the knowledge upon which they could make their own informed choice. The decision to take a risk would be theirs, having had the opportunity to avoid it. At present, that choice is not available. There is something to be said, all other things being equal, for providing it.

At present, any Health and Safety Executive warning relating to a public venue is confidential. There may be a good reason for that, but I cannot imagine what it is. It is only after a major fire, or some other disaster, that the public become aware of the risks that they have been running. It is hardly surprising that they then take the view that there must be a better way of avoiding such tragedies. The Bradford City stadium disaster in May 1985 provides a classic example, because in that case warnings had been given by the Health and Safety Executive before the disaster, in which 50 people died. The dangers were known, but they remained confidential.

Some supporters of the Bill make the argument that the public have the right to know, but that phrase somehow makes me uneasy and I think, instead, of a presumption in favour of a well-informed choice. Whether or not the Bill is the right vehicle for creating that presumption and choice is for right hon. and hon. Members individually to decide. But that choice ought to exist.

The second purpose of the Bill, and that upon which my hon. Friend mainly relies, is to shame owners into reacting quickly to notices served on them. Although the average football supporter may not read notices, the local journalist certainly would, and such a notice could be a constant source of embarrassing headlines. There would be no question of warnings being tucked under the carpet and of nothing happening. There is nothing like the fear of bad publicity to spur owners into action.

The Bill is one of many ways of trying to increase safety levels, but one can go too far. Safety should be the first consideration in respect of passenger trains and football grounds—but it should not be the only consideration. Safety should be a hugely important factor, but far from all-consuming. We lead immensely complicated lives, and many aspects of them must be taken into account.

In the past, many activities have been undertaken without any thought being given to safety. The King's Cross underground fire is but one example of the possible consequences. It was obvious to all that underground safety needed to be dramatically improved, and since that tragic fire occurred safety has risen to a very high place on London Underground's safety agenda—so high that it is beginning seriously to disrupt the service.

My constituents in Wanstead and Woodford—stuck at the end of the Central line—are among those who suffer as a result of that serious disruption. Two days ago, I made a tour of the Central line with London Underground officials and discussed safety requirements, particularly those imposed by the fire brigade. I learned that the fire services must be called and a station evacuated at every report of the smell of smoke. That may sound sensible, but it takes away from station managers discretion, where that could be valuable. Time and again, station managers find that smoke reports have no foundation, but, until the fire brigade has arrived and completed its investigation, the station has to be closed and train services are disrupted. It is time that the fire brigade and London Underground got together to work out a sensible balance of safety as I am not sure that such a balance currently exists.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): My hon. Friend is absolutely correct in his remarks, particularly as the smell that some people think is smoke is only the consequence of a train's brakes being applied.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend, whose constituency is also served by the Central line, knows that only too well. The huge investment to be made in the Central line will, I hope, reduce the frequency of such reports, and my constituents will certainly welcome that.

It is interesting to contrast the attitudes of British Rail and London Underground in respect of reports on safety precautions. Reports relating to British Rail stations are kept secret, whereas London Underground makes such information available to the public. Perhaps the best aspect of my hon. Friend's Bill is that it would create greater openness in bodies such as British Rail, and help to establish a better atmosphere of open information.

British Rail instituted a safety management system following the Clapham disaster, with the aim of achieving total safety, supported by systematic auditing. British Rail felt that maximum safety could be attained only by sustained effort at all levels of its organisation and through effective monitoring. The railway inspectorate's latest annual safety report on British Rail commented:

> "No one should underestimate the practical difficulty of achieving total safety in a large and scattered organisation, where so much depends on individuals."

I do not believe that total safety can be achieved. Yesterday's incident in Whitehall showed us how fragile is our safety and that there is little that we can do to achieve total safety. That is not an argument for not trying to achieve it, but an argument for setting realistic goals.

The Bill has good points and less good points, points with which I agree and several with which I do not. I have strong reservations about whether the Bill will achieve its aims, modest though they are. I am not even sure that if its provisions had been in place at the time of the disasters that have been mentioned it would necessarily have prevented them. The Bill places some burdens on industry,

[Mr. Arbuthnot]

and some on the statutory authorities to which it refers. However, at least my hon. Friend is having a stab at the problem and for that he should be congratulated.

10.58 am

Mr. Simon Hughes: (Southwark and Bermondsey): I anticipate that my speech will not be far gone before this debate is interrupted for the private notice question, so I will deal with the preliminaries now, and make my substantive points afterwards.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman means that he will ramble on later.

Mr. Hughes: No, I shall not ramble on.

I am grateful for the invitation to serve as one of the Bill's supporters. Unlike the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot), I remember being asked, and assented willingly. I do not make any deductions in terms of memory, other than that.

I am indebted to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) for taking the opportunity of gaining a place in the ballot to debate a subject which we are all at times made aware—if we are not aware already—is one of massive significance to large numbers of people.

I also pay tribute to the community rights project which has done the work. That organisation is a constituent of mine, as it has always been since 1983, and has been assiduous throughout various staff changes to ensure that the House is confronted with the opportunities and given the support to bring forward legislation like this Bill.

My final tribute is to the British Safety Council, which, as the hon. Member for Battersea said, is always there trying to encourage good practice and the opportunities for the House to do its bit. I am delighted that at last we are getting an opportunity to——

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Sleeping Rough (London)

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what emergency action can be taken to deal with people sleeping rough on the streets of London during the inclement weather.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): Five hundred extra bed places have been made available in emergency shelters which were operating last night. Those will remain open while the very cold weather continues, and 200 of the places, at the Paddington Green and Soho Square hospitals, will remain open until the beginning of March. These shelters are being funded by the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health, but I should like to pay tribute to local authorities and voluntary bodies which have responded very quickly to the cold weather by organising these shelters.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I thank you for granting a private notice question on this important matter, Mr. Speaker.

Last night, along with many of my colleagues from the north of England and Scotland, I found myself snowbound at Euston. While returning to the House, we witnessed some of the most appalling sights imaginable —ill-clad people shuffling through the streets with nowhere to go, and people sleeping rough in indescribable squalor, caked in snow, lying on pavements and in shop doorways.

I understand that people in London this morning have been expressing the deepest concern over what has happened. I understand that deaths and innumerable cases of hypothermia have been reported in the capital. Something has to be done—not next week, not tomorrow, but today—now. I am afraid that 500 places are simply not enough. We are dealing with thousands of people. We need action now.

The bad weather has been forecast for as long as a week. Not one of the thousands of people whom it is estimated are sleeping rough should be left to sleep on the streets of the capital tonight. Will the Minister announce a state of housing emergency in London, with the requisitioning of a number of major public properties? Will he get the police to set up an emergency rough sleepers' search programme in the capital and instruct them, where possible, to collect those people in need and ferry them to locations such as school premises, empty Government buildings, church halls where available and whatever public buildings can be found to take these people off the streets? Can he ensure that hot food and bedding are made available? Most of all, people need a roof over their heads tonight. We are confronted with a real crisis in the capital today. Something must be done, and it must be done now.

Mr. Yeo: I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the fact that, during the past few weeks, people have been sleeping rough in central London. As it happens, we have asked the voluntary organisations, which are in the front line of contacting rough sleepers in the streets, to conduct a careful count for us of those people sleeping rough at present. There are a number of organisations which specialise in different parts of central London. The

count, which was conducted towards the end of last month, showed that just over 1,000 people were sleeping rough at that time.

The voluntary organisations, which have a great deal of expertise in this field—I am glad that we have Mr. Nick Hardwick on secondment to my Department, since he has considerable experience in this field—have agreed with us that the programme that we have put in place is sufficient to meet the needs as they see them on the ground.

Our aim is to ensure that there is no need for anyone at all to sleep rough in central London during this very cold weather. There is no need for anyone to go without food, because it is available, both in the night shelters and day centres, whose location is well known to outreach workers for the voluntary organisations and the police in central London—who have also been very co-operative. I can assure the House that my Department is reviewing the situation not just every day, but every hour, and if we find that it is necessary to make additional places available, we shall do so. Additional places may be made available even before this evening.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): While my hon. Friend's response is very welcome, will he ensure that all steps are taken to publicise the availability of these beds? Will he continue to keep the matter under review and does he agree that our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's statement yesterday on cold weather payments is very welcome and shows that the Government are prepared to take action where necessary?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is quite right about the very rapid response announced by the Prime Minister on the availability of cold weather payments. As regards publicising the additional places that we have made available in the past few days—we have increased the number of places by 250 since the beginning of this week—we are confident that the most effective way to do so, in a manner which will reach potential rough sleepers who will need the places, is through the voluntary organisations' outreach workers and through the police.

Steps have been taken to ensure that, where additional places have been made available, as they will be from 9 o'clock tonight, people likely to come into contact with potential rough sleepers are aware of the location. Indeed, if someone who is on the point of sleeping rough on a very cold night arrives at one of the shelters where places are fully occupied, we are trying to make arrangements for them to be tranported to another shelter where space is available.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Of course what the Minister has said is welcome, but it does not go far enough. When I was dropping off my colleague, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) at Hyde Park underground station at 6 o'clock this morning, people were sleeping there. People are liable to be sleeping rough in every tube station, railway station and road in central London.

Would it be a good idea, first, to ensure that the Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance—whose workers are indentifiably people who care—are asked to go out tonight in uniform, supported by the outreach workers, who may be unknown and therefore may arouse more suspicion in those sleeping rough, as might the police? As angels of mercy, they would identify the people who are sleeping on the streets and say to them, "Come with us and we'll take you somewhere safe." They could be backed up by the ambulance service.

Secondly, could a phone number be provided which is commonly available in the capital, which could be used either by anyone in need or by anyone who indentifies someone else who is in need? It would not merely be for those sleeping rough but for the elderly and the sick, who may be vulnerable because their homes are not sufficiently heated.

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman's last point goes rather wider than the original question, but I shall draw that matter to the attention of my colleagues.

As regards the people that the hon. Member and his colleague may have seen last night, we are advised that spaces were available in the increased places that we have made available this week, and were not taken up. If we are not communicating the message sufficiently well to people who are still sleeping rough I shall consider his suggestions about other voluntary organisations and find out whether there are any other ways in which we can publicise the existence of places. I reiterate that our aim is to ensure that no one needs to sleep rough. Perhaps, although we are making extra capacity available, we need to review how that message is being communicated to people on the streets.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that I have frequently gone out on the Salvation Army soup run to those people who sleep rough, and that the Salvation Army should be praised more than any other organisation in our nation for the wonderful work it does? Is my hon. Friend aware that we need to persuade some rough sleepers who have no confidence in the authorities to come into shelter and that we must make sure that that shelter is provided? The Salvation Army has the confidence of those people, who will willingly talk to Salvation Army officers and confide their needs. Will my hon. Friend therefore do everything he can to back that organisation and ensure that it has the extra support that it will probably need to do its wonderful work?

Mr. Yeo: I gladly join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the Salvation Army's work, which is of immense value. I also had an opportunity of touring the streets before Christmas, in an entirely unpublicised study of the problem on the ground. I was impressed that the voluntary organisations concerned not only commanded the confidence of many of the people who were sleeping rough but had a detailed knowledge of the problem. They seemed to know the background of many individuals concerned. We see the interface where the voluntary organisations act, and we are providing resources.

It is clear that the immediate problem has nothing to do with financial resources; it is purely a matter of making sure that we have the physical capacity, that we are able to staff the extra places that are being made available and that the people concerned who might want to use them are aware of them. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the role of the voluntary organisations and their workers is critical in that function.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Minister mentions voluntary organisations and says that it is not a matter of financial resources. Is he aware that the various financial restrictions that the Government have placed on

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

London borough councils, including poll tax capping and the restriction of expenditure, have forced some of them unwillingly to cut the grants to some of the very organisations that are trying to address the problem? Will he now give an assurance that any expenditure by such affected councils will be made, and will be made legally, by them without risk of prosecution and going against the restrictive and anti-social legislation that he and his hon. Friends have imposed on the people of London?

Mr. Yeo: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should demonstrate such complete ignorance of the subject. This matter has absolutely nothing whatever to do with the excessive community charge that is levied in many parts of London. Although I recognise that many local authorities have been very helpful in the past few days, organisations that are in the front line of dealing with rough sleepers are not under-resourced in terms of meeting the needs of the next few days of extremely cold weather.

To the extent that people were still on the streets last night, it is, as far as I can tell, the result of those people not being aware of the additional spaces that we have made available and resourced.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): May I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for what he and the Government are doing in this matter? As he rightly says, it involves a relatively small number of people, which means that it can be solved with determined and co-ordinated action. Once one has the proper estimate of the figures, which should not take too long, bearing in mind the fact that we anticipate, unfortunately, that the cold weather will last for some time, surely the Government can bridge the gap. Only the Government have the strength and financial resources to bridge the gap between voluntary bodies and their own determination.

Will my hon. Friend seriously discuss with his colleagues in the Government bringing in the Army, the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve and the police, who have installations and buildings that could help to meet the gap? It is unacceptable in our prosperous society that even one person should be on the streets in these conditions. Has my hon. Friend any estimate—I know that it is difficult to say—of people who are suffering from mental disabilities? The full horror of that problem will come home to all hon. Members.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The problem is relatively small in terms of numbers and therefore can be solved. I believe that the programme that we have in hand will not only solve the immediate difficulty of this cold weather, but, over the next few months, through the extra hostels, medium-term hostels and the move-on accommodation that we are making available during 1991 will be sufficient to ensure that none of the people who are currently sleeping rough need still to be doing so, even in crisis shelters, by the end of this year.

On the possible role of the Army and the TAVR, at the moment the voluntary organisations and volunteers are best placed to meet the immediate need in terms of sweeping up people off the street. They know where they are most likely to be found. As has been said, they are more likely to command the confidence of people who might be deterred from making contact with someone who appeared to be an authority figure. Nevertheless, we shall consider the suggestion.

As I have said, financial resources are no part of the problem. It is a matter of finding physical accommodation, and the volunteers and staff to operate it, and making sure that the people who might want to use it are aware of it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the private notice question of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) concerned people sleeping rough in London. I have no doubt that many of them may have come from Scotland, Wales and elsewhere, but questions should be directed to London, please.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Does the Minister accept that we are astounded by his statement that voluntary organisations are not under-resourced, but are actually satisfied with the Government's actions on this issue? It does not tally with our messages from voluntary organisations. Will he further accept that the problem in London is exacerbated by physical and financial under-resourcing in the regions, which then has a direct effect on the London situation? Will he assure us that local authorities in London and wherever else necessary are given all encouragement—indeed, direction if they are reluctant—and financial recompense for any actions that they take in this emergency?

Mr. Yeo: I can only reiterate that, following the meetings that my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I have had with the main voluntary organisations dealing with the problem—the ones that are experienced in meeting the needs of people on the streets—for the purpose of actually providing crisis accommodation in this period of extreme weather, they are not under-resourced. Such organisations may have wider aims and longer-term ambitions for which they would like additional resources, but, for the purpose of actually providing accommodation tonight and for as long as the period of extremely cold weather lasts, I do not believe that the organisations have a financial problem.

I forgot, in answer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), to respond to his point about how many of the rough sleepers may have a history of mental illness. When the voluntary organisations conducted their recent survey, they tried to establish the different reasons why different groups of people on the streets actually got there. It is quite true that a number of people who are sleeping rough or who have been sleeping rough have such a history and that is something about which we shall talk to our colleagues at the Department of Health and the Department of Social Security.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does my hon. Friend accept that, whatever the reason, people are roofless in London and they should not be at this time? The House gives a great welcome to my hon. Friend's announcement today and to the announcements that have been made during the past few weeks about arranging for emergency shelters. Will my hon. Friend pick up the point that was made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and encourage local newspapers and local radio to give out the telephone numbers

of social services departments, so that those who are not presently roofless but who are in great need can be referred to those who can give help?

Will my hon. Friend recognise that we are concerned not only about the established contacts of charitable organisations that night after night pay attention to the needs of roofless people on the streets, but about people from overseas and others who come to London for the first time, who are not yet in established places where the voluntary services can make contact with them? It is worth doing extra work to sweep those people into a system in which they can have a roof and warm food during this exceptionally cold period.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks on the initiatives that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and I have taken in the past few weeks. We shall do all we can to encourage the local press and radio stations to give as much publicity as possible not only to the location of direct access accommodation but, equally important, to the statutory and voluntary organisations that can counsel people who have not reached the point where they face the prospect of sleeping rough. My hon. Friend made the important point that a number of rough sleepers and potential rough sleepers may have recently arrived in London from abroad. There are advice centres that are specially able to counsel people in that position, but I shall follow up the point and see what else we can do.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does the Minister agree that Scotland will need some extra cash during this crisis weather——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Member of what I said a moment ago.

Mr. Wray: Irrespective of where they are, the Government have had 11 years to clear up the problem, and there should not be one person lying out in the street. Does he agree that the social fund has created dire poverty? There were record refusals in October and November—60 per cent. in loans, 50 per cent. in grants and 10 per cent. in crisis loans. Will he speak to the Minister responsible to obtain extra resources?

Mr. Yeo: That question did not bear even a tenuous relationship to the subject that we have been discussing for the past 20 minutes. However, as the hon. Gentleman has ranged more widely, I am glad to say that in England, London and Scotland the quality and quantity of the nation's housing stock has never been so good.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Will the Minister listen to his colleagues on the all-party parliamentary group on housing, of which I am chairman? Will he listen to the voluntary organisations about their inability to cope and their lack of funding? Is he aware that the Salvation Army is facing a £7 million deficit this year, that a housing trust has lost five schemes this year, that Centrepoint says that it is in real danger of running into difficulty because it has too many responsibilities, and that Stonham housing association will carry a large deficit this year amounting to two thirds of its funding? When will he listen to his colleagues and to the voluntary organisations, which cannot be expected to cope with these crises?

Mr. Yeo: It is precisely because we do not expect the voluntary organisations to cope on their own that we are resourcing through my Department and the Department of Health this rapid and flexible response, which we have demonstrated this week, to meet the needs of rough sleepers in cold weather. I recall planning quite a large voluntary organisation before I came to this place. My then colleagues in the voluntary sector and I were skilful in putting across a constant image of tremendous financial crisis.

The voluntary organisations have wide-ranging aspirations, which I do not denigrate, but it is not for the Government to meet all those needs. The question is on the problem of people sleeping rough in extreme weather in the past two or three nights and possibly over the weekend. I am confident that, if there are any constraints on our ability to respond to this distressing situation, they are imposed by the difficulty of finding accommodation, whether it be in disused hospitals or schools, and have nothing to do with money.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The severity of the current weather has been forecast for up to a week. To what extent was machinery put in place in preparation for that? Although one must concede that this is primarily a metropolitan problem, with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I must say that people are sleeping rough in all the major cities of this country. To what extent will analogous provision be available through local government and voluntary agencies in those other major cities?

Mr. Yeo: My Department's ability to respond to the forecasts of cold weather has been demonstrated by the fact that last weekend we made available 250 additional places, on top of the existing 2,100 direct access places in London. Since last weekend, as we have observed the weather getting colder and have read the forecasts, we have made available a further 250 places, making the total of 500 to which I originally referred.

The possibility is that, following the check that we are making this morning on occupancy levels last night, we shall make additional spaces available tonight. Although the question is confined to London, the problem in central London is different from that in other cities, because people are coming into London from other parts of the country. The Department is playing a co-ordinating role, but in other cities it is a matter for the relevant housing authority to respond to.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I refer the Minister to column 926 on 30 January, where the Minister for Housing and Planning said that the Department's estimate of homeless people in London alone was between 2,000 to 3,000 people. That shows how Government policy has failed, particularly with direct access hostels, for which the Government are offering little help.

How do the Government intend to deal with the current scale of the crisis, because 500 places is not sufficient? If the Government expect voluntary groups to take the major pressure of this crisis, what resources will be made available to them and what proposals will the Government bring before Parliament to ensure that homelessness is dealt with and that we recognise that there is a crisis not just during the cold weather but all the time?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Lady refers to the estimate that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning quoted in response to a parliamentary question. It was because we felt that our figures were out of date that we asked—and

[Mr. Yeo]

we received full co-operation from them—the voluntary organisations most experienced at dealing with rough sleepers in London to carry out a more recent count. The estimate that they produced came to 1,046. We may have to give or take a few here and there, but that count was conducted by people who have been working in the front line of the problem for some considerable time. We shall therefore use that figure to replace the earlier and out-of-date estimate quoted in the parliamentary answer.

If the hon. Lady had paid any attention to debates and Question Times when this problem has been discussed in the past two months, she would know full well that the 500 places to which I referred have been an emergency response to an emergency situation. We have a bigger and far wider-ranging programme to deal with the problem. This year, we have 500 longer-term hostel places coming on stream, of which 250 will be available within a month. We have 800 places in move-on accommodation and in shared and self-contained flats and houses, which will come on stream this year, of which 500 will be available by the end of next month. We are spending £15 million in the current financial year and £81 million more over the next two years to deal with the problem.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I share the concern and anger felt by my hon. Friends. I am amazed by the Minister's complacency. His estimate of the number of homeless people sleeping rough in central London does not square with the parliamentary answer that was given by the Minister for Housing and Planning. On 30 January 1991, he said:

"My Department estimates that there are about 2,000 to 3,000 people sleeping out in central London, and up to 2,000 in other cities."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. 926.]

Why is there an enormous gap in the statistics between the estimate of his hon. Friend, the Department's estimate and the estimate that the Minister has given today?

The daunting problem of London's homeless has been raised by my colleagues on many occasions. The Government cannot shelter behind their late and puny action. This is a crisis of the Government's own making. What action are they going to take to tackle the root causes? We heard no answers from the Minister today. The root causes include the Government's failed community care policy, which means that people leave long-stay hospitals for the streets. They also include the economic failures, which mean that unemployed young people are driven away from their homes to search for work in London. Those unemployed young people come from Scotland, Wales, the north-east and all other parts of Britain. They include the Government's social security policy, which denies 16 and 17-year-olds money to support themselves. They include also the Government's housing policy, which denies young people and poor people affordable housing. The Minister has failed to address those matters today.

The main problem facing us today and over the next few days is the 2,000 to 3,000 people who are sleeping out in London in this bitterly cold weather. What is going to happen to them tonight, tomorrow night and the night after that? The fact that thousands of old people, young people and mentally ill people are forced to sleep rough is a national scandal which surely even this heartless Government cannot continue to ignore. What is the Minister going to do about that? The cold weather hits those people particularly hard.

When the weather is as cold as this, the homeless are not just sleeping rough: they are sleeping dangerously. They are threatened with frostbite, pneumonia and hypothermia. Will the Minister make emergency payments available for food? We understand from the charities that some youngsters have not eaten for two days. Will he make that emergency payment available immediately?

Will the Minister also give rents to people for accommodation? People will need accommodation tonight. Will the Minister promise the House that he and his officials will personally accompany me and some of my colleagues around the streets to see the people sleeping rough tonight, so that we can find out what the problem is and what those people need?

Also, the Minister has not clearly explained what assistance he is giving to the charities and voluntary organisations to provide shelter for the homeless. Most of all——

Mr. Summerson: Too long.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am not taking too long. This is a very important problem.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question. It is not a statement.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Minister made several points, and he has not responded to the concerns expressed by my hon. Friends. It is right and proper that we should have full answers to all those questions. Unless that happens, many of the people about whom we are concerned today will die over the next few days.

Mr. Yeo: I apologise to those hon. Members who are hoping to take part in the debate in which the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) will be speaking shortly. However, the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) clearly wrote out her question before she listened to my earlier reply. I dealt with nearly all the points about which she went on at excessive length.

I certainly will not, and neither will my officials, respond to the hon. Lady's invitation to accompany her around the streets of London on some kind of publicity stunt. We are out there, without television cameras, looking at the situation for ourselves. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and I, as I did before Christmas, and my officials are involved in that. We will continue to work in the closest possible co-operation with the voluntary organisations, to which I pay a warm tribute for their excellent role in responding to the situation. We are very glad to have the services of Mr. Nick Hardwick on secondment from the voluntary organisations to my Department.

Clearly the hon. Member for Cynon Valley was not listening to me. I said that the figures I gave were the most recent estimate carried out by the voluntary organisations on the ground. They show the number of people sleeping rough in central London towards the end of January.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley also raised one or two additional points, whose connection with the private notice question was somewhat obscure. However, I remind her that, in this country, every 16 and 17 year-old has a right to training. Any youngster who is not employed or in

further education can take part in a training scheme. If the hon. Lady had any concern for the youngsters she claims to be worried about, she would be urging those who are not taking advantage of those training opportunities to go out and register for a training scheme right now.

With regard to the severe hardship payments, I am advised that the local social security offices have some discretion to make severe hardship payments to those youngsters who have not yet registered for the youth training scheme.

In conclusion, I can assure the House that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and I are profoundly concerned about the problem. We are not in any way complacent about it. We are, with our officials, reviewing the situation not just from day to day, but from hour to hour, and we will continue to do that.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet. We have an important private Members' day before us and it would be unfair to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), whose Bill is before the House, if he did not have adequate time. That would put his Bill in jeopardy. We should return to the Second Reading.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a Front-Bench spokesman. I will take his point of order, but it must be one that I can answer and not a point that he would have liked to raise on the private notice question.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You never fail to remind us every month at Scottish Question Time that this is a United Kingdom Parliament. I know from experience yesterday that many of the people sleeping rough——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will stop the hon. Gentleman there. I have called an hon. Member representing a Glasgow seat; I called an hon. Member from Wales; and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson is also from Wales; I called an hon. Lady who represents a midlands seat; and I also called the chairman of the Back-Bench committee; I have also called London Members. On a private notice question on a private Members' day, I cannot call everyone who wants to participate.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps you can give the House some guidance. I am seriously concerned that the Minister may have misled the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must find another opportunity to raise matters of that kind.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that it is not easy on most Fridays to have a private notice question and to call everyone who wants to speak. I am not talking about myself—I am thinking about some of my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: Let me finish the point of order.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman always tries to be extremely helpful to me, but he would be the very first to complain if an hon Member on his side of the House or even he himself had been fortunate in the ballot for private Members' Bills——

Mr. Skinner: Let me explain.

Mr. Speaker: No, I do not need an explanation, because I think I know what the hon. Gentleman is going to say.

I granted the private notice question. If the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) raises points of order of this kind, naturally the Chair may become less disinclined to have business interrupted.

Mr. Skinner: The point that I want to make is that you have said several times that this is a private Members' day. It is, and that is important. However, I must tell you that you may not be aware of the fact that, later on today, the Government spokesman is going to block the Public Safety Information Bill, so this private Members' day will not be a private Members' day.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman persists in making points of order, there will be no need to block anything.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you heard anything from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about whether he intends to come to the House this morning to make a statement on a problem which does not have the immediacy of the crisis with which we have just dealt but which affects many of the small investors whom the Government have encouraged to invest? Part of the financial regulatory structure is about to crumble: the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association is likely to become insolvent or go into liquidation. It is essential that we have a statement from the Secretary of State on the seriousness of the problem.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no indication that the Government want to make a statement about that matter. I must confess that I do not know anything about it myself. We should return to the Bill.

Public Safety Information Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

11.39 am

Mr. Simon Hughes: Before the private notice question —which I am grateful to you for allowing, Mr. Speaker —we were debating the Public Safety Information Bill of the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis). I had completed the acknowledgement section of my speech; I now want to come to the substance.

The most important philosophical and political issue raised by the Bill is the overriding and in some ways uniquely British attitude to safety. We have an almost pathological belief that matters should be kept secret. The number of matters that are still kept secret in Britain would surprise even the informed observer. Minute pieces of information held by Government Departments, of absolutely no security relevance, are still secret information.

It is a paradox that on transport matters, it is possible to learn more from abroad than at home about events that take place here. One can obtain more information about British Rail and reports compiled by it if they end up in the United States, because of the rights under the American constitution and legislation. That is unacceptable. The Bill seeks to make it obligatory that information about safety information produced by someone with authority, which comes into the hands of someone with authority, is put in the hands of the public. What the public do with it is a secondary issue.

The hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) rightly said that there is not even parallel response or duty. I and, I expect, other London Members receive regular reports from the local fire and civil defence authority and London Underground when inspections are carried out on underground stations in our constituencies or those in which we have an interest. London Underground and other elements of London transport produce that safety information. British Rail does not, as the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford rightly said. There is not logical reason why the same standard of provision of information should not apply to public transport—whether underground, bus, railway, ferry or aeroplane—and public venues such as night clubs, football grounds, cricket grounds, sports stadiums or any other venue.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman bear in mind what the Bill says? I have followed his remarks closely, and I have a feeling that there is a danger that he might have misunderstood the Bill, at least as I understand it—my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) may wish to correct me. The Bill refers to statutory authorities. In cases where such authorities have identified a substantial threat, the information must go through the process in the Bill. Some of the examples which the hon. Gentleman gave would not come into that category and would not be covered by the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: They would come into the category if the information relating to the football ground or bus came into the hands of the relevant statutory authority. The hon. Member for Battersea quoted the former leader of Bradford city council, who came by information about the ground which never came into the public domain.

I accept that the Bill is limited. Many of us would have preferred it to go further. I expect that the hon. Gentleman would have preferred to make it go further. We all know that for private Members' Bills to have a chance of becoming law there must nearly always be a compromise. There is always a Government Department, like a black cloud, saying, "We shall allow only this much to go through. If you go any further, we will bring in our troops on a Friday afternoon." Whether the Government could have done so today in sufficient numbers, I do not know. The Bill has that limitation. It requires that the information percolate through to the relevant authority. It would then go on to be publicised. Even so, it is welcome that the Bill covers a whole range of activities. There is no logical reason for inconsistency.

I wish to cite two examples in support of my case. I shall be explicit, critical and even rude about the Department of Transport and British Rail. My first example is inevitable. It is the case of the Marchioness, which sank, as the House will remember, on 20 August 1989 in the Thames.

After that incident, which caused the deaths of 51 people, a copy of the then draft report on the Marchioness compiled by the statutory body, the marine accident investigation bureau, came into my hands. For the first and so far only time in my life, I decided to leak parts of an unpublished report, because a substantial burden of the report was critical, not of individuals such as the skipper of the Marchioness or the Bowbelle or any other vessel on the river, but of the public authorities and in particular the Department of Transport, which failed to take heed of warnings which it had been given.

In March 1990, almost a year ago, I released excerpts of that draft report. I did not release the whole report, because I was conscious as a lawyer of the duty not to prejudice individuals' rights and the right to defend of anyone who might be taken to court as an individual to defend himself. In the event, one person has been taken to court and the trial is pending. That matter is sub judice.

The report was clear. Written by the proper investigative agency, it said, among other things, that poor visibility on passenger launches and the inadequacy of warning lights were recognised following a series of minor accidents between 1981 and 1983. The draft report went on:

> "The general consensus of opinion, especially among those who operated the larger vessels, was that something had to be done quickly to prevent a major accident occurring between their craft and a passenger boat."

Those incidents

> "were recognised at the time as providing a warning of the possibility of a major accident . . . as time passed the perceived need for special caution gradually relaxed.
>
> It is not considered that, in all respects, action taken by the Department in the last few years has gone as far as it should have."

It is paradoxical that, as a result of some of the accidents in the 1980s—48 collision accidents were recorded by the Port of London authority on the Thames, and there were nine previous accidents involving the Bowbelle—Ready Mix Concrete, the owner of the Bowbelle, had written in 1983 to the Department of Transport about its worries on safety on the river. That information came into the hands of a public authority. The Department of Transport chose not to take action—or at least, not sufficient action. It is notable that once the Marchioness collision occurred and 51 people died, speedy action was taken—which I recognise and for which I was

grateful—by the then Minister for Public Transport, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) and the then Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) and others to implement measures, many of which could have been implemented earlier.

I have absolutely no doubt that, for example, keeping passenger lists, controlling sound systems so that the people on the bridge could hear more clearly what was going on, displaying notices which make clear where the exits are on vessels and dealing with inadequacies of design —which still have not entirely been dealt with—would have increased the probability either that the collision would never have happened or that the number of dead would have been lower. You do not have to have been with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the Southwark cathedral memorial service for the victims to know what grief, pain and anguish are caused to people, especially if they feel, with justification, that it need not have happened at all.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman who knows of my interest in river matters and in this tragedy especially. Is he telling us that there was notification to the Department of Transport, or to a public body within it, that there had been as many as nine incidents relating to the Bowbelle and that that was recorded and known by the Department? Can he tell us, within the constraints of the sub judice rule, which he and I both respect, whether action was taken consequent on those nine incidents?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have to be careful. My understanding is that the PLA kept a record of the incidents, which was available on request. I requested it myself and was grateful to receive it. I understand that the Department of Transport would have known of those incidents and of the concern expressed by users of the river from 1981 to 1983. I understand that no specific action was taken on any of those matters from 1981 until the implementation of the regulations in the autumn of 1989, after the Marchioness sank.

I must concede, as it is right to be correct, that some of the regulations passed in 1989 covered or overlapped with some of the concerns expressed in 1983 and were a result of general European initiatives. However, the regulations did not deal with the incidents explicitly, they did not appear to respond to the concerns of 1983 and they did not deal explicitly with the sequence of collisions, some of which involved these vessels, and some of which involved others. Collisions had been a persistent fact of river life. Some were serious, whereas others involved only glancing blows and were not of great importance. However, the collection of incidents should have given proper cause for concern about navigation on the Thames.

My other target is British Rail. A constituent of mine, Paul Elvin, died in November two years ago having been electrocuted when working as a fitter at Euston station. I knew him and his family before he died. In 1989, Kevin Doherty, the brother of a friend of mine, died while working at Epsom station. Those two people died on British Rail property. In the first case, a prosecution was eventually taken out against the sub-contractors. I was grateful to the Attorney-General and his officers for investigating whether the Director of Public Prosecutions should take out a prosecution for corporate manslaughter against British Rail or others. In the event, the charge brought was a health and safety charge against the sub-contractors and a conviction was secured.

Before the trial, the case was, quite properly, the subject of an investigation by British Rail. However, as in the case of the Marchioness, the report, which was produced a long time ago, is still not in the public domain. Even recently, the family of Paul Elvin have been told that they cannot now get the report, even though no criminal proceedings are pending and the case has been dealt with, unless they start civil proceedings. Only then, on discovery, will the report be released.

Mr. Forth: So that we are all on the same ground here and in the spirit of trying to be helpful, may I remind the hon. Gentleman again that the Bill deals with matters of public safety? I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is very much on the ground of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, which is concerned with health and safety in the place of work. I have ministerial responsibility for that. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be fair with the House and make it clear that the cases he is mentioning would not be covered by the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: The last two cases I have mentioned are, of course, health and safety at work examples. The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and I have acknowledged the fact that private contractors on a private building site would not be covered by the Bill. However, someone on a public transport site such as Euston station, who may be going to use a train owned by British Rail, or someone who may be going to use a bus owned by London Regional Transport is in the domain of public safety because the public have access. The Minister seems to be nodding his head.

Mr. Forth: No.

Mr. Hughes: The Bill would govern the publication of information. I hope that the Minister will bear with me for a second. The Bill would have had a material effect on the fate of my constituent and of others in the future. I want to tie the two points together.

If the report on the Marchioness had been published immediately it had been finalised, the public at large would have been able to judge whether they felt that the safety of boats on the river was such that they could use them. The publicity about the report in the press, in the House and at places of embarkation would have made that information clear. Information would have been displayed for prospective users to see.

There is no excuse for the report still being secret. If the report is kept secret, things may not be done that should be done and the public will then be at greater risk. As representatives of the public, we have no assurance that public safety has been guaranteed.

The Paul Elvin case gives a similar example. The British Rail report, of which I have not seen even a draft copy, may have identified a failure. It may have confirmed that there was no publicly available sign to show that the overhead wire was an electric cable and that people had to stay safely away from it. There was also no warning sign telling people to keep away from the building works, as I saw for myself.

I went to the station with Paul Elvin's cousin a couple of weeks after he died. We were able to go on to the site and there was no warning sign telling people to keep out.

[Mr. Hughes]

We were able to go on to the site, to climb on the scaffolding and to walk around the site without let or hindrance. If such incidents can be avoided by a Bill such as this, which will ensure that the risks are made clear and that what reports have said is made public, we shall have achieved our objectives.

Mr. Bowis: I hope that we can clear up any misunderstanding between the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Minister. The Bill, as I understand it—I hope that I understand it—deals with areas to which the public are admitted. An employee who was injured in one such area, at Euston station or anywhere else, would be a beneficiary of the measure. However, if he was injured while working on the tracks, he would not be covered by the Bill, because the public are not legally entitled to walk along the tracks.

Mr. Hughes: Paul Elvin was electrocuted on the platform at Euston station. He died the following day in University College hospital. Kevin Doherty was killed as a result of having come in to contact with a live rail, in a slightly different case. In the second, it was in an area to which the public could have access, although they should not. At Euston, there is no doubt that it was a public platform.

We need the Bill. I hope that we shall then go on to make four other changes. First, the present law must be properly enforced. If there is meant to be a sign saying, "Danger—Keep out"—if there is meant to be a warning sign—whether it's at Euston station or elsewhere, it should be there. There is no excuse for it not being there. I believe that Paul Elvin would not have died if the proper precautions had been taken on Euston station.

Secondly, we must change the order in which events are investigated. Official reports should be published as soon as they are available. The argument against that is that they might prejudice a trial. Let the authors of the report be able to be called in the trial and to be cross-examined. Let us have the report first, so that we have all the information when we decide whether somebody should be prosecuted.

Thirdly, let us make it clear that the system of inquests will be changed, so that those who are bereaved or who represent the deceased have a full right to have any questions they want aired at the inquest. In that way, all the prospective evidence about the cause of death will be placed before the coroner.

Finally, it is a great grievance of people who are bereaved that, when a prosecution takes place or is considered in relation to anyone or any firm that might be guilty—for example, British Rail, the owners of the Marchioness, the owners of the Bowbelle, or Townsend Thoresen which is the owner of the Herald of Free Enterprise—the relatives should have a chance to have their say. They should have a right to at least an interview with the prosecuting authorities and to place the questions they want answered on the agenda. Therefore, when the trial took place they would feel satisfied that their interests were being looked after and could feel that the people who had died had not died in vain.

The people who know most about the circumstances of an accident that causes death are the families of those who died. They make it their business to find out. People are often interested only when motivated by tragedy or personal crisis. We should use that experience. Such people would say that the best way forward was for any available, authoritative information to go into the public domain, so that the public can make it clear that they will not accept the answer, "We should have known better—we could have done it another way."

12.3 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on doing so well in the ballot and on bringing before us the subject of public safety information. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that it is important to be properly informed in the interests of public safety.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke of finding out more about what happens in this country by listening to those from overseas. On defence, we can learn a lot more from the Americans about what is happening in this country than we know ourselves. As a nation, we have been inclined to be secretive about such matters. Perhaps politicians and those in authority thought that they knew best, but that is not always so. In this day and age, with universal education of a high standard, we should involve ourselves much more in the process.

I am concerned about one or two aspects of the Bill. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea because I have to attend a constituency engagement—the same one that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) mentioned earlier. He has already departed and I shall have to chase after him to catch up. It is a local authority commitment and we both represent the same local authority district.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea will consider my worries and give them proper attention in Committee. I have two specific anxieties related to practicalities and my fear that there may be so many notices that their importance will be cheapened. In the King's Cross fire, the escalators were made of wood that was thought to be incombustible, although nothing, including steel, is absolutely incombustible. In that case, would we have to notify everyone that there was a problem at King's Cross because the escalators were made of wood? If polystyrene tiles were used on the ceiling and painted over—which many people acknowledge is a recipe for disaster—they would become a dangerous fire hazard, but apart from taking them down and starting again, there is not much that we can do about such a product. Would it mean that, at every station where anybody could join the network and finish up at King's Cross, it would be necessary to have a statement that it could be hazardous to alight at King's Cross? That could be a problem.

I am anxious about that, because many other such problems could be identified on different parts of the network and there could be many notices—all using metric units rather than imperial ones, about which I, too, am sorry. If there were too many notices, people would have to arrive at the station 10 or 15 minutes early for their journey to examine them, which could be a disadvantage. Familiarity would breed contempt and people would not bother to read the notices, so the whole point would be missed. That issue must be addressed.

I am also worried about manpower. When a new process is introduced, although the general cost may not

be high, the fact that people are involved in it means that other people have to be diverted from different tasks or more people have to be employed. If the job is to be done properly, we must address that problem. There should be sufficient manpower in local authorities. I am already worried that planning enforcement in my district is not carried out as well as I would wish.

I have many constituents who say that their complaints are not dealt with quickly enough. When industrial sewing machines are used in a terrace of houses and disturb the immediate neighbours, investigations are carried out to establish whether there is a legitimate case for complaint —that involves manpower. The same is true with complaints about noise nuisance. People have to be sent from the local authority to check whether there is a noise nuisance. Other ways of dealing with such problems can be expensive in terms of time and employing professional advice. Therefore, the local authority is the natural authority on which people rely for help. We do not want people to be diverted to other jobs when we are already short of staff to deal with existing problems.

Mr. Bowis: I entirely accept that there is a specific problem in terms of the number of notices along the transport system and we must consider that problem in Committee. The report on King's Cross related specifically to risks due not merely to the materials in the lift, but to the gaps that led to the collecting of rubbish underneath.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) referred to local government manpower. No additional local government manpower will be used except where the local authority is the safety authority, which is not the case in transport facilities. They are linked to health and safety and the Department of Transport. London Underground Ltd. has set up its own authority. Therefore, the proposal should not involve manpower implications. My hon. Friend should compare the cost of checking that the report on King's Cross is effectively monitored with the cost incurred after the fire, the renovations and the new staffing arrangements that had to be made.

Mr. Thorne: Local authorities are responsible for issuing licences for a considerable number of sites, including places of entertainment and football grounds.

I accept that local authorities have no direct relationship with transport nationwide; certainly some of them are involved with transport although not in London. However, they are engaged in licensing entertainment premises, for instance. A disco redecorated with oil-bound paint and polystyrene tiles would become a fire hazard, and that would be a matter for the local authority. Under the Bill, would that involve the authority in extra investigations and inquiries and in ensuring that it had enough staff to check every time premises were redecorated? I fear that local authority staff will be diverted to such tasks and away from dealing with other problems.

I do not say that this is not an important function: it is. I should like the responsibility for such matters to be vested in the people who take the action in the first place. Architects or owners of buildings who allow combustible materials to be used should be made responsible for any resulting hazards to life and limb—that is better than making the local authority check. Local authorities must not become more bogged down in the process.

Mr. Bowis: I repeat that we are discussing only cases in which a substantial danger has been perceived by local authorities that are safety authorities. Under their present licensing and monitoring arrangements I assume that they do no less, and if they need more staff to carry out inquiries they should already arrange their financial affairs so as to be able to afford them.

Mr. Thorne: Is my hon. Friend saying that when a licence comes up for renewal a local authority will have to carry out a full inspection before it issues another licence——

Mr. Bowis: I am saying that if that already happens and will continue to happen under the present law, the Bill will not affect the process. The Bill will be triggered only if, in the course of such an inspection, a substantial threat to the public is perceived. There should be no great manpower implications or shifting of resources beyond what a local authority should engage in anyway if it perceives a threat.

Mr. Thorne: So the legislation will be activated only if such a threat happens to come to a local authority's notice and no additional burden on it is implied?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have been following this discussion all morning. If a safety authority sees a danger that needs to be eliminated, such dangers are already prohibited and the Bill will not be triggered. But if a safety authority for any reason perceives a danger about which it believes people should know—a danger that is not the subject of prohibition but is not insignificant—notices should be displayed and the local authority should add the incident to its register. Is that correct?

Mr. Thorne: Indeed. So may I take it that there is no additional pressure on local authorities to discover such information? If dangers come to their notice they are required to notify the public under the Bill, which I hope will become an Act. But if dangers do not come to their notice they will not be infringing the law and everything will be the same as now——

Mr. Bowis: The only person who would be infringing anything would be the occupier of the premises who permitted a risk to the public to continue, assuming that he knew about it. Once the matter had been drawn to the attention of the safety authority it would be expected to look into it and, if it considered that it constituted a substantial danger, that would trigger the mechanism of the Bill.

Mr. Thorne: I am grateful to hear that no extra burden will be placed on local authorities. They are very busy and carefully watching their community charge bills, and we do not want to add to their responsibilities.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said that removing guards from trains detracted from safety standards. I disagree. There are other ways in which to improve safety on the railways. Instead of employing additional staff, the railways would be better advised—the hon. Member for Newham, South, should support this idea—to move to the system being so effectively used on the docklands light railway, where electronic equipment takes over driving the train and opening the doors and the train captain can devote his or her attention to the safety and comfort of the passengers. We should explore that idea in the context of the underground and elsewhere.

[Mr. Thorne]

No less than £1 billion has been earmarked over the next 10 years for London Underground. The money will be used for leaflets, staff training, heat detectors, fireproofing and construction on the underground, much of which was built so many years ago.

One of the good results of the sad events at King's Cross was the complete ban on smoking on the underground. That has considerably improved the safety, comfort and convenience of passengers.

The hon. Member for Newham, South talked about Southern region disposing of guards on all lines. The region is extremely congested, having more junctions than any other comparable network in the world. We should spend the available money on sorting out those junctions and grading them to reduce the great number of potential causes of accidents, not on unnecessary guards. The hon. Gentleman suggested that passengers on Southern region write to Members of Parliament demanding that guards be reinstated throughout the network, but we should remember that when a crew member fails to turn up because he is ill, say, that can often mean that a train does not go out; whereas with single-manning that does not happen, and it is hoped that there would be enough reserves to provide adequate services for the long-suffering commuters on Southern region.

When this matter is discussed in Committee I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea will tell us how his Bill would cover incidents such as the Zeebrugge disaster. Much of the information that came out of that was dealt with only within the company and never entered the public domain. If the Bill deals only with matters in the public domain, incidents such as Zeebrugge will not be covered by it, unless a mole in the system leaks the information to the public.

Mr. Bowis: Perhaps my hon. Friend did not hear my speech. I referred to the indirect benefits of the Bill in incidents such as Zeebrugge. It would not be a mole, but the captains of the vessels, who had warned the company about the need for lights on the bridge to show whether the bow doors were open. If they believed that they were getting no satisfaction from the company about putting it right, I have no doubt that, were such a channel available for information to reach the safety authority, which could investigate whether there was a substantial risk, it would be used.

Mr. Thorne: I assure my hon. Friend that I have been here throughout the debate. It was not clear from his speech whether he appreciated that it is not easy for staff to put private company matters into the public domain. Employers consider these matters to be private and if they are drawn to the attention of the public the employee will not attract the accolade of the employer, especially if a programme to put the matter right is expensive.

I am worried that such internal matters may never enter the public domain unless a captain or a steward, or a mole in the system, draws them to public attention. That frequently happens in Government Departments. Moles sometimes appear, but they are rarely from the civil service. It is disgraceful that it happens. If such matters reach the attention of the public I am sure that a reporter, if he felt the matter was of public interest, would make it an issue for debate.

It is important for people not to be besieged by notices of one sort or another dealing with all the affairs in which they become involved. People could become so confused that they would not take the matter seriously. The Bill must separate important and unimportant matters. We must not allow people to be so deluged with unnecessary information that it loses its usefulness. I certainly hope that we can promote and improve public safety information.

I am sure that my hon. Friend knows of my considerable interest in the St. John Ambulance and of the amount of work that I have tried to do by drawing attention to the need for adequate safety provision at sports grounds. That is a considerable problem because while some football clubs, for example, are extremely helpful and readily provide facilities, others are extremely reluctant to make funds available for adequate public safety. Publicity tends to fall on deaf ears.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford said that no one really expects a catastrophe to happen to him. People think that catastrophes happen to others. At Hillsborough, Bradford and other places, matters could have been vastly improved if the first-aid facilities made available for the use of St. John Ambulance and others had been much better. I hope that we can properly look into and advance the cause of public safety in all walks of life.

12.24 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): In his interesting speech my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) spoke about St. John Ambulance and its services. I am in the middle of correspondence with the Ministry of Transport and British Rail about first-aid facilities for passengers at Victoria station. We need to be aware that in some areas where provision might be expected there is no statutory responsibility. I would not argue that we should do only those things required by statute, but where large numbers of people are gathered together, such as at rail and other transport terminals, we should consider what the provision ought to be, either directly or through the St. John Ambulance or others, so that those who find themselves in need can receive immediate attention rather than waiting for an ambulance to be taken to hospital. Thousands of people passing through Victoria station do not seem to have the provision that is found in many places of entertainment and sports stadiums. I do not ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give an immediate answer to that, but I use it to link my speech to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South.

We need to distinguish between risk and casualty reduction on the one side and the improvement of safety on the other. It is easy to increase safety without bringing about any reduction in the numbers of people who are killed or injured. That comes out most obviously in one area with which I have had an association—reducing casualties on the road. It also links to the work of the Health and Safety Executive when I served in the Department of Employment about six years ago.

With relatively small numbers of inspectors and a large number of establishment, it is easy for an inspector to spend all his time without having any impact on casualty reduction. Inspectors could make sure that the right notices are displayed and try to ensure that they visit all the

premises for which they are responsible, if that is possible, but that would not necessarily focus on the issues that matter most.

Much of the garment trade is located in the east of London and there the inspectors are right to concentrate on matters likely to lead to catastrophes. There may be people working in premises in which the fire door is padlocked, and there can be even greater danger if the person who has the key to the padlock is off somewhere else. Inspectors are right to concentrate on inspection systems for boilers, because an exploding boiler could have the same impact as a mortar bomb landing in the garden of No. 10 Downing street. It may not get the same attention, but it could be just as disastrous.

The Bill does not include the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) not only on raising this subject but on the work that he has put into the Bill and his speech. However, I counsel him that if he is advised to incorporate the provisions of that Act into the Bill, he will end up with a huge computer print-out. There are many provisions in that Act and when piled up, they would probably be about 1 m—or 3 ft 3 in, to use the old imperial measure—deep.

As my hon. Friend said, information would probably have saved the lives of people at Bradford. There were warnings about a specific potential cause of a dangerous fire. No one could have predicted that the fire would lead to so many deaths, but the Bill would have led to action being taken. We would then not have known that lives had been saved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea mentioned the Clapham crash and other hon. Members mentioned the Marchioness. By itself, the Bill would not have affected either of those tragedies because nobody could have said in advance that a specific risk was evident.

Having a culture of risk reduction, and giving people more opportunities to make a fuss—even if they are accused of having bees in their bonnet, as I often am——

Mr. Forth: Never.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is too kind. Some people want to whistle blow because they are concerned about their responsibility to their passengers who are their fellow human beings. Here, I am thinking mainly of transport, although the Bill applies to other sectors. People who make their views known achieve results.

One way to achieve results is to realise, as my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea does, the importance of trade union membership. The trade union health and safety representatives do a great deal of unsung work in this. They co-operate with employers as well. Trade unions, together with organisations such as the Industrial Society and training boards, deserve credit for what they have done in this sector. They are a bit like the people teaching in primary schools. Their achievements are not noticed until some years afterwards when the statistics make them clear.

In organisations large and small, a positive approach to trade unions is important. I say this with some force because my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea was the national organiser for the Conservative trade unionists before he came to the House. I hope that more people will follow his footsteps so that the interests of people at work are represented by both sides of the House. People's interests are served by more than just giving them more money or extra skills. Safety at work is part of the unsung, unpaid work of 200,000 shop stewards and safety representatives in every industry.

More attention to detail might have helped in the Clapham and Marchioness disasters.

Much of the support for the Bill comes from people who have been involved in tragedies. My experience has been mainly of road casualties. Every day, 14 people die on the roads. Those who suffer from the results of such tragedies and not organised, apart from the Campaign Against Drinking and Driving. I say to anyone who would ignore the interests of those who have been involved in disasters, whether Lockerbie or the Marchioness, or of those who have been bereaved by them, that they should try the experience of sitting in a room with 300 people who have nothing in common except that, for each of them, a member of his family has been killed in such a way. That provides a focus for what too many of us ignore because we take it for granted that someone else will deal with it.

Information, especially if it is given in public, or more often if it is given by a public authority, is ignored. When I was a Minister in the Department of Transport I was concerned about the risks to railway passengers if a bridge over a road was carried away by an oversized vehicle. In co-operation with many others, the Department produced a report called, in plain English, "Bridge Bashing". It dealt with how we would cope with the one in 10 chance that, over the next 10 years, there would be a major disaster when a bridge over or under a railway is carried away, with the result that a train with 400 people on board will come to an abrupt halt. It will not be like Cannon Street—it will be an even greater tragedy.

We set out to halve the risks, but that still leaves some risk. Some bridges are too low to allow the passage of an articulated lorry with a container. We put up signs by these bridges, but still people crash their containers into them and leave the container behind. So far, a bridge has not been carried away. There is information about that risk and there has been a public approach to reducing the risk in a cost-effective way, but we know that such behaviour continues, with the certainty of injury which increases with every day that passes.

The Department also endeavoured to bring to the attention of highway authorities the desirability of making roads as skid-resistant as possible. It calculated that by spending a relatively small amount of money each year —not just on national roads, but the 96 per cent. of highways that are the responsibility of local authorities —to raise their level of skid-resistance to a cost-effective, appropriate level, there would be a significant return on that investment, in terms of the number of casualties that would be avoided.

By using a monitoring machine, it is possible to determine roads where the coefficient of friction is too low according to the standard. However, what was to be done where local authorities could not immediately arrange for contractors to undertake the necessary resurfacing? The answer, which is roughly in accordance with the provisions of the Bill, was to require an authority to erect a sign warning of a slippery road ahead. However, that has led to a rash of such warning signs, which I fear some people might tend to ignore.

When road conditions are as bad as they are at this moment, everyone drives more cautiously—but I hope that road users will respond more to warning signs even in

[Mr. Bottomley]

normal circumstances. That is one example of how public safety information can allow an individual to modify his or her behaviour and to reduce the risk to which they and others are exposed. There are some elements of public information already enshrined in law, such as that relating to the limit on the number of persons who can travel in a lift, and the legal obligation on places of entertainment to publicise that they are licensed by the fire authority to accommodate only a certain number of people. One might think also of the notices displaying the prices in bars or restaurants, but that is to move away from the serious issue of reducing casualties.

I will not speculate on the causes of the Cannon Street disaster because it is the subject of an inquiry. All railway and plane crashes should be the subject of an open inquiry as quickly as possible, so that their cause can be identified. I take the view that prosecution is a secondary issue and that the matter of first primary importance is to determine how and why a disaster occurred.

One reason why buffer crashes cause a large number of injuries and, sadly, sometimes death, is that passengers have the freedom to open the door of the train while it is still moving and to stand in the door frame. If the train comes to a sudden halt even when it is travelling at only 5 mph, any person who does that is at serious risk of suffering extra injury. I shall not cross-question my hon. Friend the Minister about whether he thinks that train doors should have a sign warning of that danger, but even general awareness of the risk does not stop people taking it. Therefore, we must respect my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea for taking a limited approach.

It is not meant as an all-singing, all-dancing Bill; it is aimed at filling gaps in the provision of information to the travelling public. It is part of the nature of life that people may eventually take such information for granted. One reason for having parliamentary debates of this kind is not just to give guidance to public administrators, safety inspectors and others and to attempt to change the law, but to educate the media, which are the source of information for the majority of people. That is illustrated by the importance of advertisements and editorial publicity relating to product recalls for safety reasons, whether the product be an anorak or a motor car.

It is the unusual which gains most attention. Disasters such as King's Cross or Kegworth, both of which I attended with sadness, are unusual, but if they have the effect of prompting people to travel by road instead of by rail or plane, that will lead to more rather than fewer casualties.

While we are giving illustrative examples about some of the crashes and disasters in the air and on the road, we need to recognise that if the distance travelled on the roads were switched to the airways, instead of 5,400 deaths there would have been 650, and if all the miles travelled on the roads were switched to the railways there would have been only 150 deaths last year.

Sometimes we spend our time considering how to spend hundreds of millions of pounds to try to save a few lives and turn our back on issues that will predictably affect hundreds of thousands of people this year, and which we could change at virtually no cost.

As a public authority, we should put a sign outside the Palace of Westminster saying that if people cycle out of here without a cycle helmet, they have a 60 per cent. greater chance of dying if they are in a crash, because 80 per cent. of cyclists die in crashes in which only their head is injured. Medical research has shown that in 80 per cent. of those cases, their lives could have been saved by wearing a crash helmet. I shall not make this point directly to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who I know is a cyclist, but I think that we have some responsibility when we know that people leave here relatively unprotected. Wearing a helmet is an example of how people can reduce their own risk. Often that is less exciting than having arguments in our professional lives about our responsibility to others. If we are to have a culture of hazard reduction we need to consider all aspects of safety issues.

I would make a similar point to authorities that provide cars for people to travel in. One of the curiosities about my move from the Department of Employment to the Department of Transport was that at the former I was driven around in cars with rear seat belts, whereas when I was at the Department of Transport and was supposed to be exhorting people to wear seat belts, my replacement car had no rear seat belts and it took two weeks to have them put in.

Rear seat belts provide protection and can cut out two thirds of the risk of injury to the wearer. Under the provisions of my hon. Friend's Bill, the Government car service should put a sign in every Minister's car stating that the rear seat belt provided will reduce the wearer's risk of injury in a crash by two thirds and will halve the passenger's risk of injuring the driver. As an unrestrained projectile hitting the driver, who will be wearing a seat belt, the passenger is unnecessarily adding to the risk to someone else at work. However, that provision is not likely to be made in the Bill because it is unfashionable to be concerned with practical, low-cost measures to reduce casualties on the roads, although that is as important as some of the other issues that have been mentioned.

I support my hon. Friend's intentions in the Bill, although I do not know whether it is the right way to achieve them, but that can be considered in Committee. My hon. Friend rightly wishes to let people act and behave in the full knowledge of what is happening. He is providing that people will not be unnecessarily ignorant. A journalist in the *Financial Times*, Christian Tyler, who was describing an Austrian scientist, quoted him as saying that the biggest problem is not AIDS—although that is important—but AIGS, which stands for apathy, ignorance, greed and stupidity. My hon. Friend's Bill is aimed mainly at the apathy, and provides that if a risk is known to some people it should be made known to other people, if there is

"a substantial threat of danger to the health or safety of a member of the public."

The Bill will affect many Government Departments. From my experience of studying the responsibility map of the Health and Safety Commission, let alone the Health and Safety Executive and the various Government Departments with an interest in such matters, I doubt whether there will be unanimity that the provisions in the Bill are a good idea or that it is a good idea for information to be shared by everyone. Fortunately, at the moment I do not have to concern myself with that, because I am a supporter, rather than a member, of the Government.

If the Bill is successful this year, people who have been less than enthusiastic will recognise that it has no dangers

for them and has some benefit for the public. If the Bill does not manage to progress instantly, I hope that Ministers who believe that it is either of neutral or positive benefit will see whether it is possible to incorporate it in the general programme of work of the Health and Safety Executive.

A clause was inserted in the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). One cannot use the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act to reduce the level of safety available to people. I suspect that where information is known, it could be caught by the Act, although it would be a rather more administratively cumbersome way of making progress. Most of the regulations in the Act could incorporate some of the responsibilities that my hon. Friend would put on others.

People look for comparative information. That applies to product liability just as much as to safety. I shall not speak for too long about product liability, because it is not relevant to the Bill. However, I am still trying to persuade motor cycle manufacturers to make leg protectors available on their bikes, especially those ridden by people in their early years of motor cycling. That would cut out two thirds of the risk of serious leg injury in crashes with cars. It would also probably eliminate two thirds of cycling injuries. Yet not one motor cycle or moped manufacturer makes that equipment available even as an option, although it has been demonstrated by the transport and road research laboratory to be effective. I hope that—if not under this Bill, under a similar Bill—every motor cycle will carry a notice stating, "It is known that it is technically possible to reduce the risk of injury in crashes but we have not chosen to make that option available."

Safety is not just about notices; it is about people's dedication to carrying out their duty not to go beyond precise regulations and the requirements of their contract of employment to help people to move around safely. The hon. Member for Newham, South was right to say that it is necessary to stick to regulations in a positive sense.

I pay tribute to the staff on the railways and the roads. In the past two or three days, they have been doing all that they can to help people to move around safely. In these Siberian conditions they have not been fully successful, but hon. Members in the warm House of Commons Chamber should recognise the work of those who, probably through the hours of darkness, worked hard so that we could move around safely and make these points.

12.47 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I thought that there was interest in this Bill from other quarters. Perhaps I am wrong.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on his Bill. The official Opposition are not opposed to the Bill and we shall do everything we can to ensure that it makes progress. I hope that it will receive unanimous support, but I am beginning to doubt whether it will.

We do not regard the Bill as a panacea. It is a necessary part, but not the major part, of several measures that are needed to ensure safety in the public domain. I shall refer later to some concerns that arise out of the Bill. In its recent policy document, the Labour party made it clear that it will fully support the concept of the right to information and that

"Labour will give the travelling public the right to basic information about safety and security matters. This will complement Labour's proposed Freedom of Information Act."

The Bill will at least save us some trouble if it is passed. It is important to recognise the role of information.

We have already heard accounts of many disasters that have taken place in recent years. We have just had the decade of disaster, central to which has been the role of central Government, who have underfunded public bodies, whether they be the Health and Safety Executive, various inspectorates or whatever else.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman said that the Health and Safety Executive is underfunded. On what basis does he make that serious charge? He must know that Dr. John Culler, the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, is on record as saying recently that it has all the resources that it requires to carry out its responsibilities. How does the hon. Gentleman's serious allegation fit with that?

Mr. Lloyd: It fits because the Minister's quotes are wrong. Dr. Culler said that its resources are sufficient for it to carry out its programme of works, which is not the same as carrying out its responsibilities. I have said in this place and elsewhere that I do not believe that the Health and Safety Executive or the Health and Safety Commission are fulfilling the obligations that the Government have set them.

The director-general of the HSE recently made it clear that it can no longer respond to all complaints from the public. The Minister's claim that the standards of the HSE and the HSC are higher than in the past is not true.

I invite the Minister to arrange a debate on health and safety in Government time. It would be helpful for him to put the case as he sees it and for me to put the Opposition's case. I say that because I am conscious of the fact that it would not be right and proper to take up time in this debate, although those matters are of critical importance.

The Government have underfunded other public sector bodies, such as British Rail. Some disasters on British Rail have been a direct consequence of old and outdated rolling stock and equipment. At least part of the cause of the King's Cross disaster was that cost pressures bearing down on management were so tight that they were unable to make safety a priority. That was more than regrettable, and it was condemned by Labour Members. The Government are central to that series of disasters.

The House must recognise that the Government cannot run away from their responsibilities. I say that because, today, they will once again refuse to play their part by allowing even this fairly small measure. They will attempt to kill it off, by stealth possibly, as they did two years ago, when my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) introduced a Bill. He was successful only because he was able to prove the dishonourable role that the Government had played.

Provision is made in the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 for some of the measures that the hon. Member for Battersea is trying to introduce. I hope that the Minister will comment on that. Section 3(3) says:

"In such cases as may be prescribed, it shall be the duty of every employer and every self-employed person, in the prescribed circumstances and in the prescribed manner, to give to persons (not being his employees) who may be affected by the way in which he conducts his undertaking the

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prescribed information about such aspects of the way in which he conducts his undertaking as might affect their health or safety."

That rather complex parliamentary language means that the Health and Safety Executive could impose on every employer a duty to ensure that members of the public are aware of when their health and safety may be affected by what happens at a place of work. That would clearly cover the tragic and disgraceful case of Paul Elvin, which was cited by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

That specific power was provided in an amendment to the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Bill. The amendment was tabled by Lord Whitelaw, who was leading for the Opposition. I understand that he persuaded the then Minister of State, Department of Employment, who is now the Chairman of Ways and Means, to accept the amendment, because it was agreed on an all-party basis that the provision of information was central to safety at the place of work and to providing a safe place of work for employees and for the general public. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that and agree that something that was acceptable to Lord Whitelaw all those years ago should now be acceptable to him when he addresses the wider issues involved in this Bill.

I have some concerns about the way in which the Bill would operate in practice. I do not say that with any hostility. I recognise that, in order to have safety, we need more than just the provision of information. Information is vital to the structure, but we need more than just information.

I dealt with a problem in my area not so long ago, involving the traffic commissioner in the north-west. I will not mention the name of the bus company concerned, but I can say that, after a time, it got its act together and began to put safer buses on the road. The traffic commissioner became aware that that company was operating unsafe buses which presented a danger to the travelling public. He decided not to prohibit the operation of those buses; he allowed those dangerous buses to run. I entered into lengthy correspondence with Mr. Albu, who was the commissioner concerned, and with Ministers. They all seemed to think that it was perfectly reasonable for unsafe buses to ply the roads of Manchester.

I believe that Mr. Albu had been frightened off when he lost, on appeal, previous attempts to restrain the activities of a particular bus company. I place that on record, because, like the hon. Member for Battersea, I believe that it is important that we scrutinise our public officials. Those officials should be aware that if they make decisions that are open to criticism, they will rightly deserve that criticism when the decisions become public. The traffic commissioner to whom I have referred failed in his responsibilities to the travelling public.

If we apply the powers under the Bill, that same traffic commissioner could decide not to move on to the public notice stage. In effect, he could decide that his decision not to prohibit the running of the buses could be open to such criticism that he would be foolish to signal that he had taken that decision by insisting that the operator gave public notice of the fact that its buses were less than safe.

I hope that the hon. Member for Battersea will accept that that analogy applies not just to transport undertakers, but across the range. At the margin, such action could constrain the behaviour of safety regimes if they are left to operate as they do now—underfunded and demoralised.

We must consider the relationship between central Government and the statutory bodies that are designed to ensure safety in Britain. We do not have a safety culture and safety is not deemed to be automatic. For example, *Which?* recently published a survey of ferries. I was involved from the Opposition Front Bench in the Herald of Free Enterprise affair. That massive tragedy caused the deepest agonising among hon. Members on all sides of the House. It should now be impossible for a passenger-carrying ferry operator to operate ferries that are not completely safe.

However, the *Which?* report made it clear that six ferries using British ports still rely on passengers climbing down rope ladders to life rafts as a primary means of evacuation. *Which?* points out that those companies are operating within the letter of the law; they break no laws by using that mechanism. It is not a procedure which would allow the publication of a notice such as that enshrined in the Bill. The ferry operators breach the principle of safety but no other principle.

As long as the Department of Transport is prepared to conspire with the ferry operators to allow them to operate ferries in an unsafe way, no provision of information will get over that immediate hurdle. That is central to safety in Britain. At present, we simply cannot trust the regulatory agencies. That is a serious challenge, which I make in full knowledge of what I say. The regulatory safety bodies now in existence simply are not doing the job that the travelling public and other people are entitled to demand.

Until we begin properly to resource regulatory safety bodies and make safety paramount at the place of work and wherever the public confront potential danger, we shall not have the climate and culture of safety which the House should demand. If we do not have a structure, especially in the Health and Safety Executive, within which reports on disasters or even accidents that do not lead to tragedy are monitored, the safe working practices which we are entitled to demand will not be translated into practice.

The attention of the House has already been drawn to the Clapham disaster. There is no doubt that faulty wiring had occurred previously on an almost outrageous scale. The attention of British Rail had been drawn to those faults on several occasions. It was not a new problem. It is also clear that safety reports had been examined by British Rail. The inquiry made it clear that the problem was a failure to disseminate the information sufficiently widely.

A secondary, but equally important, problem is that there was no mechanism or public body within either the Health and Safety Executive or the Department of Transport that could ask British Rail precisely what it had done to implement the conclusions of previous safety reports. That is fundamental.

The Minister could come to the Dispatch Box today and do two things. First, he could say that he intended to implement section 3(3) of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and make sure that information is made available to the public now. There is no need for today's Bill to be passed for him to do that. He could do it today.

Secondly, the Minister could tell the Health and Safety Commission that he expects it immediately to set up within the HSE a mechanism for monitoring previous safety

reports. If he does that, he will take a significant step forward for the safety of people both at work and generally. I challenge him to do that.

If we are to create a climate of safety it is important that we have in place penalties for those who transgress safety regulations. Reference has been made to various disasters. It is clear that those who were culpable in those disasters were not brought before the courts in a way that exposed them to penalties that would serve as a warning and a sanction to others, and would show the severity with which the House and society treat transgressions of regulations which put health and safety at risk.

During a recent Question Time, my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) referred to Holts Plastics. My hon. Friend said that the case had gone as far as the courts allowed. The judge made some condemnatory statement about one of the partners. The transcript shows that the judge made it clear that he found himself unable to pass the sentence that he wished to pass because the wrong person was before the court. He gave a prison sentence but suspended it for a considerable time.

There is still no case of any individual serving a custodial sentence for breach of health and safety legislation. I am not one to argue for long prison sentences for the sake of them, but, as in other areas of criminal law, custodial sentences show the sincerity and seriousness of the attitude of the House to those who break the law. Health and safety and placing someone's life or health at risk should be treated sufficiently seriously that those who transgress face long prison sentences. I make it clear from the Dispatch Box that the Labour Government will make sure that such penalties are used.

There is much in the Bill that we welcome. I do not intend to continue at length, although there are more points worth putting on record. My hon. Friends, the hon. Member for Battersea, and his hon. Friends have already made some valuable points. I am concious of the fact that there may be an attempt to kill the Bill by stealth today. I hope that the Minister will consider long and hard before he takes part in such an attempt.

I remind the Minister of the role of his predecessor, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who was caught with his hand in the till, so to speak, two years ago, when my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) introduced a similar Bill. The then Under-Secretary of State for Employment wrote a letter to the Leader of the House which made it clear that his Department intended to frustrate both the House and the Bill.

I see that the Minister is now receiving something that will enable him to respond properly. The letter made it clear that the then Minister intended to frustrate that Bill, which dealt with safety and, ironically, as a result allowed my hon. Friend to push through his legislation.

I remind the Minister of the comments of the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. As a former Trade and Industry Minister, the hon. Gentleman may have some sympathy with them. In the foreword to the 12th annual home accident surveillance system report, the Under-Secretary wrote:

"The starting point for working to prevent consumer accidents is good information."

What is essential to one Under-Secretary—a willingness to insist that information is central to providing a safe and healthy working regime and safe and healthy access to public facilities—should be taken on board by another. I hope that the Minister will make it clear that he does not intend to talk out the Bill by drawing the debate out to 2.30 pm. The Opposition support the Bill and wish the hon. Member for Battersea all speed with it.

1.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): The concern for the important subject matter of those who have participated in the debate is obvious from the tone of the debate. I pay a warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) for using the privilege of his place high in the ballot to bring such an important issue before the House. The contributions that we have heard from hon. Members of all parties show that he has done no more than reflect a view that is widely held among all hon. Members. It has been demonstrated that he was right to reflect that concern in such a Bill.

I am stating the obvious, but it is worth noting that in many cases the contributions of hon. Members have reflected their direct involvement, at different times and in different ways, in disasters and catastrophes such as those described to us. It is understandable that for those who have been involved, whether as Members of Parliament or, in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), as a Minister, with people whose lives have been touched by disaster, the emotions generated are that much more powerful. That has been apparent in the speeches that we have heard today. Anyone who reads the report of today's proceedings will have no doubt of the extent to which the tragedies and losses felt by so many people have been expressed in this place. That is as it should be.

In that spirit, I will as carefully as I can pick my way through what is a very difficult proposition for the Government—to respond properly to my hon. Friend's Bill and the issues that it raises. Before doing that, I want to do something that may seem rather tedious. I want to read out some short extracts from the Bill so that they are on the record and so that we can relate the contributions that have been made today to the Bill. Many hon. Members who have spoken, including some of my hon. Friends, have not fully understood what the Bill seeks to do. Many of them have expressed concerns and suggested that the Bill, once on the statute book, would resolve the problems that they have presented to the House. I believe that they are wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea may wish to correct me. Clause 1(2) states:

"This Act applies to premises, being—
(a) land or buildings other than nuclear installations . . .
or
(b) any means of transport,
to which members of the public are admitted, either on payment of a fee or otherwise."

The Bill operates primarily on premises and means of transport. It continues:

"In this Act information on a matter of public safety . . . is information identified by a relevant statutory authority concerned with matters of public health and safety".

Many hon. Members who have spoken today have suggested that, in some way, information that is already available, in almost any form, will be dealt with by the Bill, but that is not so. The Bill refers to information identified by the relevant statutory authority. I hope that hon. Members present today will bear that in mind when they contemplate the Bill and decide how to react to it.

Clause 2 states:

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"Where the authority"—

—the relevant statutory authority—

"has determined that there is a substantial threat or danger to the health or safety of the public, it shall serve upon the occupier of the premises concerned a written warning"

The Bill then sets out the detailed provisions.

I shall return later to the tragic case mentioned by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), involving a constituent of his at Euston station. I want to give the House a little background information to that case. I am convinced that the Bill would not have made any material difference to that case, had it been in force at that time.

Mr. Lloyd: Will the Minister comment on my earlier point that section 3(3) of the existing Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 would have covered precisely the case mentioned by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey? Could not the Minister bring that section into effect immediately?

Mr. Forth: I do not believe that that section would cover that case. I am advised by officials in the Health and Safety Executive that it would not. This is neither the time nor the place to be diverted into the esoterics of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act, although I realise that it is of prime importance. However, I shall undertake to consider the matter again, as the hon. Gentleman asks, to see whether there is any scope within that Act to do what the Bill seeks to achieve. I am advised at present—I will consider the matter further—that it will not have the effect that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Lloyd: Will the Minister undertake to place that advice on the public record if the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey asks for it in a written question?

Mr. Forth: It goes without saying that, whenever any hon. Member puts down a written question to me or to any other Minister, he receives a full, prompt and direct answer, as would be the case here. I do not wish to be diverted into that case, because, although it is important, I am not sure that it is germane to the provisions of the Bill as laid before the House today.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea and I will not fall out over the Bill at this stage. As I understand the procedures of the House—I am open to correction—the purpose of today's debate is to consider the text of the Bill as printed and to decide whether to give it a Second Reading.

My hon. Friend told the House in his excellent opening speech that in discussions with me and others he has already identified areas in which the Bill might be improved, and that is certainly true. It can indeed be improved. Today I intend to stick to the Bill as printed, despite our discussions, because that is the only basis upon which we can proceed. We all know the fragile nature of private Members' legislation. Whatever Members may say about the Whips' role, at least they impart a certain degree of predictability to what may happen to legislation. I do not want to go into details that might embarrass my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), but I can reveal that with effective whipping we can at least structure the progress of legislation and give it a certain predictability—too much predictability, Opposition Members might think, but they would not think like that if our roles were reversed.

The difficulty with private Members' legislation is that once a Bill goes into Committee it is subject to the free will of Members of Parliament, acting as individuals, representing their consciences and constituents. That sounds good—at least I hope it does—but it renders unpredictable what may happen to a Bill.

I cite as evidence of this what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed how carefully I listened to his speech. He expressed a wish that the Bill should go further than it does. If the Bill goes into Committee by decision of the House there will those on the Committee, like the hon. Gentleman, who want to go further——

Mr. Bowis: Just as my hon. Friend has said that he will follow the usual rules and not consider amendments that I have announced, I hope that he will not dwell too much on admendments that no one has announced or claimed that they want to table. After discussions with my hon. Friend and his colleagues about the amendments that I have in mind, I offer the Minister my pledge that if I do not table them in Committee, he will do so and I will support him; and if the Committee overrides them, I will support my hon. Friend on Report.

Mr. Forth: As ever, my hon. Friend is kind and generous. Of course I will not talk speculatively about amendments which may not be made to the Bill; I shall talk about the Bill as printed. I cannot acknowledge what my hon. Friend has said about amendments to the Bill today because we cannot be certain that the Bill would emerge in that form, even given my hon. Friend's undertakings. He might table amendments in Committee, and I might want to support them, but we can only act as individuals there. But other hon. Members can do as they please and judge best in Committee——

Mr. Peter Bottomley *rose*——

Mr. Forth: I thought that I might tempt my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bottomley: The Minister has indeed tempted me. In my experience, many private Members' Bills leave Committee with much less in them than they they go in as a result of the careful ministrations of the Ministers and Whips surrounding the hon. Member bringing in the Bill.

Secondly, next time a Government Bill returns from Committee dramatically altered from its shape on Second Reading, I shall assume that I can go home at 7.30 pm and not wait around, whipped, to get through 400 amendments in an hour and a half at midnight.

Mr. Forth: I must leave that to my hon. Friend and the Whips Office. I am not sure whether he was talking about a private Member's Bill or a Government Bill in that case——

Mr. Bottomley: It does not matter.

Mr. Forth: The two are not the same. The key difference between Government Bills and private Members' Bills is that Government Bills—let us give them the benefit of the doubt—have been carefully thought through and have perhaps been the subject of commitments in a manifesto or in the Gracious Speech or of examination by officials and

civil servants in one or more Departments. They are subject to the scrutiny of committees that I am not allowed to mention, the existence of which we normally deny. All those things happen to a Government Bill. Unfortunately, private Members' Bills do not go through this process. Some people might say that they are the better for it, but in many cases private Members' Bills suffer from not going through it. This Bill has suffered in that way.

The Bill has a number of defects, some of which are due to the fact that it has not gone through the process for Government Bills. That is my cue, lest people think that I am speaking over-long, to deal with the substance of the Bill. First, we have a number of objections to and difficulties with the Bill and they extend over broad areas. Current arrangements about public safety and access to safety information are adequate in most areas. Some provisions have been brought about as a result of the disasters about which many hon. Members have spoken. I shall return to that, because in a number of cases we have legislated or changed the law in response to the tragedies that have been mentioned.

Secondly, the procedures envisaged by the Bill are overly long and bureaucratic and I shall go through them in some detail. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea has said that he is prepared to consider changes, going through the Bill's provisions will illustrate some of the dangers that still exist. The Bill will place burdens, which many hon. Members have underestimated, mainly on statutory authorities, certainly on local authorities, and even on the private sector. Those have been somewhat glossed over, although my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) rightly dealt with them in his speech.

Finally, there are some small technical difficulties in the Bill of the kind that would certainly need to be examined in Committee. As my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea has said, London is omitted from the Bill and he, as a London Member, will want to correct that and has said so. We would have to look at certain Northern Ireland dimensions to the Bill. Some other relatively detailed matters would have to be examined if the Bill reaches Committee.

I shall outline the current arrangements to see whether I can satisfy the House that what the Bill seeks to do would in most senses be superfluous. First, the Government and all the Departments that have looked at the Bill's provisions think that there is already adequate provision for public access to information about safety hazards.

The Government are committed to the principle of openness about health and safety, which several hon. Members have mentioned. In that context many of the criticisms in the debate have been levelled at bodies that are not Government bodies but either independent public bodies or nationalised industries, over which the Government do not have day-to-day operational and management control. There must be a limit to the extent to which the Government, even by legislation, can guarantee that in day-to-day operational matters, things are made as public as many people should like to see.

Therefore, it is apparent that the primary responsibility in this area lies with managers, owners or employers to ensure the safety of the public in and around the premises in which they work or which they visit. If they fail in that responsibility, they may be prosecuted. However, I do not share the apparent desire of the Opposition for prosecutions in as many cases as possible. There was reference to a recent question in the House about a particular case. Although there is a role for prosecution in these matters, I am not sure that it is the overriding role, as is sometimes suggested; nor do I think that in some sense prosecution should be seen as persecution. We want to get this in context, so while there should always be the mechanism for bringing prosecutions, it should be not the first call but the last resort, after all the other techniques have been brought to bear.

The Health and Safety Executive has always made it clear, and I support it, that before deciding on prosecution, it goes through a number of different procedures, mainly to do with the provision of advice, guidance, help and support. In its judgment, all these are much more effective in making sure that the myriad undertakings for which it is responsible in both public and private sectors make progress in health and safety. There is a difference of emphasis, if nothing else, between the approach taken by Opposition Members and by the Government.

Mr. Butterfill: There was considerable sympathy from both sides of the House and from the general public for the plight of the train driver in the Purley crash. Many thought that he should not have been sent to prison. Surely we should not seek retribution but merely address what has gone wrong.

Mr. Forth: That is an important point. We should make a distinction between, for example, the case mentioned by the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), in which the people involved were employers and had an employer's responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, and the hon. Gentleman was not satisfied that they had been sufficiently pursued by the authorities, and that mentioned by my hon. Friend. I see that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) takes this point. The individual involved in the latter case was an employee, albeit one in a responsible position, and I am aware that many doubts were expressed about whether he should have been pursued in the way he was. That case illustrates the difficulties. Under the existing provisions, which in most cases are adequate, what action should be taken is always a matter of judgment for the authorities involved. No matter what they do, they are open to criticism. The hon. Member for Stretford criticised them for not taking enough action and my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) criticised them for taking too much action. That usefully emphasises a point inherent in the Bill; that no matter what provisions we make—I argue that the present provisions are adequate and my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea has argued that the Bill will improve them—it will be up to the statutory authority to make a judgment about the appropriate action to take.

We have heard two different suggestions today. One is that the Bill will deter people from taking the action for which many hon. Members have asked. In other words, confronted with the responsibilities that the Bill will give them, statutory authorities might draw back from giving the public the warning required by the Bill, and thereby notifying the public. It has also been suggested that the effect will be quite the opposite and that, to cover themselves, the authorities will issue a large number of notices and go out of their way to find as many threats to

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the public as possible and issue notices about them to ensure that they cannot, in any conceivable circumstances, be accused with hindsight of being less than diligent.

Mr. Bowis: It sounds to me as though the balance that my hon. Friend is striking, with those two pressures on the safety authorities, will ensure that they get their judgment about right.

Mr. Forth: My argument is that they do that now. I have yet to be convinced that the Bill would materially change that position.

Mr. Bowis: Hon. Members have repeatedly said that one of the benefits of the procedure in the Bill is that in practice it will never be used because the additional weapon that the safety authorities will have will ensure that occupiers will remedy the threat to the public before the authorities have to go through the procedure.

Mr. Forth: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will address that point when I compare the existing position with that which would obtain under the Bill.

The statutory authorities covered by the Bill—it relates only to statutory authorities—already have extensive powers to protect the public where there is a perceived danger or where, in the words of the Bill, they identify

"a substantial threat or danger to the health or safety of a member of the public."

In the case of a serious or imminent threat, the authorities may, under the existing provisions, issue a prohibition notice or order to close down parts or all of a building, or stop a particular type of work or activity, until the hazard has been removed. In such cases, the public will be banned or removed from the area or activity that is the source of the hazard until such time as the situation is remedied. The actual requirements imposed will vary across different areas of responsibility—depending whether one is dealing with sports stadiums, transport undertakings, buildings, or whatever—but they must be observed by the occupier, owner or operator of the premises and the public will not be allowed to re-enter until the area is safe.

Under that type of notice or order, the manager or owner of the business affected is likely to be losing money while work is slowed down, or stopped, or parts of the building are shut or made inoperative. In the case of a fairground, a ride would be out of action until made safe, and the owner would be losing money until that was done. In such instances, business people are likely to act quickly, so that their business can resume as normal and to ensure that the circumstances that led to the enforcement action do not recur. Pressure is built into the existing system of prohibition notices and orders because statutory authorities can already close premises or cause activities to cease and are thus empowered to exercise the same kind of coercion that is embodied in the Bill.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend's remarks are helpful, but they rather go outside the scope of the Bill. I thought that the exchange involving my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) covered the prohibition power, so perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will leave that aspect and the other de minimis issues to one side and stick to the ones in between. I refer, for example, to the situation in which the statutory authority warns the operator that action must be taken because of a significant or substantial risk of danger to the public of which the public themselves are unaware. That may be a more fruitful area for my hon. Friend the Minister to explore.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his guidance, as always. However, in view of some of the speeches that have been made—my hon. Friend has been present for the whole debate—it occurred to me that some hon. Members do not understand the purpose of the Bill, and are under the impression that it would materially affect some of the matters that have been mentioned this morning. My contention is that, even in its amended form, the Bill would not do so.

Perhaps I may press on with the point that I was making because it relates to arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea and I do not want to short-change him.

Another option is provided by the improvement notices issued by the Health and Safety Executive, fire authorities, or local authorities, which can insist that improvements are undertaken by a certain date. It is unclear whether the Bill covers them.

Mr. Bowis: It is clear that it will not be covered. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) rightly pointed out, if there is a prohibition or a detention notice, the public are not admitted, and therefore the Bill cannot operate. Equally, if there is an improvement notice —as helpful officials in the Minister's Department who deal with marine safety have informed me—it means that there is such a low level of risk that it would not in any circumstances be deemed to be substantial. We need to concentrate on times when there is substantial risk. It would be helpful if the Minister would take the Bradford fire as an example, show his concern in that case and say how the Bill would not help.

Mr. Forth: In that case, as my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea and for Eltham have requested me to do so, I shall immediately come to the analysis of the Bradford fire case, which I had intended to mention later in my speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said that the Bill would have saved lives at Bradford, but that is not the advice that I have been given. I shall read carefully the advice that I have been given about Bradford, because it is important that we all understand where we are.

Mr. Justice Popplewell's interim report on the Bradfod event, which was published in 1985, said that on 18 July 1984, as a result of a visit by an engineer from West Yorkshire county council, a letter was written to the secretary of Bradford City football club about the state of the ground. Two fire risks were mentioned, and they were as follows. As regards the main grandstand,

"The timber construction is a fire hazard and in particular there is a build-up of combustible materials in the voids beneath the seats. A carelessly discarded cigarette could give rise to a fire risk . . . Egress from the grandstand should be achievable in 2·5 minutes."

The Popplewell report explains that the Bradford City football ground was not a designated football ground, for which a safety certificate was required, and West Yorkshire county council had no statutory authority to restrict or prohibit the use of the ground. Therefore, the county council sent a copy of their letter to the fire service. The fire service took the view, which is crucial to the whole

case, that it was a matter of good housekeeping for the occupiers of the football ground to deal with and saw no reason to take the matter any further.

My conclusion is that the position that existed in 1984 was that the first authority had no power to take any action and the second authority—the fire service—decided not to do so. Had the fire authority decided to take action, it would not have been able to issue a prohibition restriction order without first going to the courts. The key to this part of the argument is that, as a result of the Bradford tragedy, the law was changed in 1987 and a local authority with responsibility for safety at a sports ground can now issue a prohibition or restriction notice, whether or not the ground is required to have a safety certificate and without first applying to the courts. I therefore make two points. First, it is our analysis of the Bradford case that the Bill would not have made a substantial difference. Secondly—and equally important—changes to the law resulting from Bradford, and since, mean that much greater powers are now available to authorities than those contained in my hon. Friend's Bill. For those two important reasons, it is not correct to tie Bradford into this argument.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The story that my hon. Friend the Minister has rehearsed, which was familiar to me at the time of the incident, is accurate but omits the suggestion that the statutory authority inspectors could, if the Bill had been law, have required a notice to be put up. I am sure that the fire service would have supported that, because it was a matter of good housekeeping to clear the rubbish away and thus prevent a fire. We all accept that one could not predict the number of casualties in the tragedy.

Secondly, if my hon. Friend the Minister is saying that there is no circumstance in which putting up a notice, as provided for in the Bill, could help, it would require a speech lasting about one and a half minutes. However, if he is saying that a notice could help but might not be right, or that other factors must be taken into account, that is fine and we can continue listening in good cheer. One ought to recognise that that provision could have been appropriate at Bradford. Instead of prohibition, there would have been warnings so that the local authority, the fire service and the owners of the ground would know.

Mr. Forth: It is a matter of judgment whether that would have been the case. Perhaps our judgments must be different on this matter. Interestingly, what my hon. Friend has outlined could have been interpreted as an improvement-type warning which, according to what my hon. Friend said a few moments ago, might not have been covered by the Bill if one looks at it from that point of view.

On the second point from my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham, of course I would not say that if we could wave a wand and have the Bill nothing would be improved. I should be ill-advised to say anything like that. Nevertheless, we believe on balance that whatever benefits may accrue from the Bill—they are fewer because of the improvements that have been made since Bradford and the like—the cost that will be incurred or will be likely to be incurred by undertakings, by statutory authorities and by local authorities will probably far outweigh the likely benefits of the Bill. Again, that is inevitably a matter for judgment.

I want to demonstrate that the costs of tragedies are greater than many hon. Members have suggested. I have listened to the argument that the costs of tragedies are so monumentally great in terms of human life and material loss that they would surely outweigh the on-going cost of such a Bill, and it is a tempting argument, but it is very difficult to sustain, as my hon. Friend and others are probably aware. In that broad sense, cost-benefit is something with which we are not familiar, not very good at, and have not yet brought into the way in which we determine such matters. That is an argument for another time and another place. I do not think that the House would agree that we should get involved in it and I am not sure whether it would be very fruitful so to do.

Mr. Bowis: Of course measures have been taken after disasters. it is because the public have become aware of the causes of disasters. They have become aware of secret reports hidden in drawers and filing cabinets and have demanded action. This measure will enable that demand to take place before a disaster. There was clearly a substantial fire risk at Bradford, but there was no improvement order. This measure would have prevented the fire. We are talking not about the cost of putting right unacceptable risks—that should be in the budget anyway—but about the costs of this small measure compared with the enormous costs post-disaster to the people involved, the premises and the local community.

Mr. Forth: I must disagree with the first part of what my hon. Friend said. The House should not get the impression that we are talking about a large number of cases in which problems have been identified by statutory authorities of the kind that the Bill is addressing—substantial threats or danger to the public—and have been hidden in drawers and nothing has been done about them. I am not qualified to say that that has never happened and I should not want to suggest that, but I do not think that it is right to leave unchallenged the suggestion that, time and again, statutory authorities or responsible authorities have identified a substantial threat or danger to the public but have simply hidden the information away in a drawer and done nothing about it. In many of the cases in which it is alleged that that has happened, it was not the statutory authority which identified the problem, so it would not have been covered by the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea suggested that as a result of the Bill, it is much more likely that the kind of information that is out there somewhere—or, more properly, in there somewhere—will be brought to the public's attention. I am not sure whether that would be so either.

On costs, the difficulty is that if we embarked on cost measurement we should have to measure the continuing cost of the procedures in the Bill, day by day, up and down the length and breadth of the land, cumulatively, as against the highly identifiable cost of occasional large tragedies and disasters. I have not made that cost calculation and I am not in a position to do so, but the balance of cost would be more even and would probably tip in a direction other than that which my hon. Friend is suggesting. That is as far as I can go without doing the arithmetic, but when I deal with the burdens that the Bill would place on local authorities, and related weaknesses in it, hon. Members will see that the dangers and difficulties are greater than we thought.

[Mr. Forth]

The Environment and Safety Information Act 1988 has been mentioned. That established

"registers of certain notices served concerning health, safety and environmental protection"

to be easily accessed by interested members of the public. Under that Act, all statutory authorities, including local authorities, must keep a register of all enforcement notices issued that concern the safety of the public. That register must be indexed and readily available to the public on request and those provisions are considered more than adequate to ensure public access to safety information. That is a major part of my hon. Friend's Bill.

Experience so far, albeit in the short period during which that Act has been on the statute book, suggests that those registers are rarely consulted and that there is little demand for the information on them. That is somewhat at odds with the vision of eager-beaver journalists consulting registers regularly and writing stories on the basis of them. Significantly, no hon. Member has offered the House examples of journalists using the procedures already on the statute book, which are rather similar to those envisaged by my hon. Friend, to bring to the attention of a concerned, eager and anxious public the information that the Bill seeks to offer. Therefore, the limited example of how these mechanisms might work shows that there is not much evidence—nobody, including my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, has offered very much evidence—that such information not only would be sought but, more importantly, would be used were we to pass the Bill.

Mr. Bowis: That is the point of displaying notices where the public and the press will see them. People are not aware of the registers and do not go to the public library on the off-chance of seeing something interesting. If a sports journalist saw a notice at a football ground he would immediately spot a story with a public safety angle, which he would then pursue.

Mr. Forth: The new provisions on sports grounds contain powers to close them, or parts of them, if a substantial threat of danger to the public is perceived. Those considerable, if not draconian, powers are already available to the authorities. I am not yet convinced that the addition of a notice or the provision of a register would add materially or substantially to public safety, health or well-being. We shall return to that when I consider the argument for registers.

As part of its drive to make the public more aware of possible dangers, the Health and Safety Executive keeps its own register of possible hazards to the public. Many firms and undertakings are required to notify it, because their activities are subject to certain legislative provisions, such as the Explosives Act 1975 or the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983. Each executive area office has a publicly available register of local undertakings which have been notified under such legislation.

I will say before anybody else does—I concede this immediately to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea—that the Health and Safety Executive has a relatively limited number of area offices—20, if my memory serves me right—whereas my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea is suggesting that more than 300 district councils would hold the registers.

I have conceded to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea that one important element of the Bill is to try to find a way of making available to the public through the registers at the local town hall the information that would flow from the procedures in the Bill. That is obviously one of the Bill's most important provisions and it is one of the main differences apart from the warning notices, between the existing provisions and the Bill.

I want to ensure that the House understands that under provisions in the Environment and Safety Information Act 1988 and the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1984 there is some degree of warning for the public and the possibility of notices for the public.

One of my main arguments about the Bill involves the bureaucracy of the procedure. I want to tie into that argument the delays that exist, even under the streamlined procedure that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea and I have discussed.

In his opening remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea said that he believes that the Bill is a simple solution to the problems of threats to public safety. I want to explain in detail——

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Oh, no.

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Gentleman does not want to listen to the details, he does not have to sit there. I am going to give the details to the House anyway because they are relevant to the consideration of the Bill and the way in which it would work.

Several hon. Members have said that they do not believe that the burdens on local authorities would be substantial. I do not agree. All of us who have at heart the desire to keep the burdens on local authorities and the cost burdens on authorities and community charge payers as low as possible will be interested in my arguments.

Under the Bill, a statutory authority that has discovered

"a substantial threat or danger to the health or safety of the public"

to such an extent that an enforcement notice will usually have been issued has 14 days in which to notify the district council. The local authority then has a further 14 days in which to issue a public safety notice to the offending occupier and place the warning issued under the enforcement notice on a register available to the public. The notice as specified in clause 2(5) and 2(7) must contain certain detailed information, some of which the public may not fully understand, for example, if the fault was fairly technical. We may want to simplify that in Committee.

Let us consider the way in which the mechanism would work. If the danger to the public is serious enough to warrant a prohibition notice and the occupier of the premises is not able to run his or her business as usual, the cause of the problem would be remedied as quickly as possible to prevent further damage to the business. I suggest that that would often happen in a matter of days or even hours so that, in the occupier or operator's interests, normal business could be resumed.

However, the procedure envisaged by the Bill paints a different picture. The statutory authority observes a potential danger to the public. Let us assume that the officer concerned is extremely efficient, as he would be, and he deals with the paperwork that evening and posts the notification to the local authority the next day. Let us also assume that the postal system is as efficient as ever and it delivers the notification the next day. The very efficient

local authority immediately sends the occupier the public safety notice which is received one day later, and enters the details on the public register immediately.

I concede, in fairness to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, that were the Committee to make the changes that I believe he has in mind, at least part of that process would be short-circuited. However, it leaves the possibility of a delay being built in between the initial identification of the problem and the communication by the statutory authority of that problem to the local authority.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend the Minister began this point by saying that he intended to show how the Bill would be an additional burden of cost to local authorities. As we know that the procedure in the Bill as drafted will not be the eventual procedure but will be the subject of an amendment in Committee with, as far as I am aware, the support of the whole House, will my hon. Friend remember that this is a Second Reading debate on the principle, not the detail, of the Bill and keep his remarks for Committee?

Mr. Forth: I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would pull me up if you thought that I was not addressing the Bill directly. I took care at the beginning of my speech to say that I wanted to refer to the Bill. I have even read out parts of it. I hope that I am being careful to stay in order. I believe that I am right to draw the attention of the House to the provisions of the Bill. In a moment I shall strengthen my argument about the burden to local authorities. The burden will increase in ways which my hon. Friend may not have foreseen. I may yet have a surprise for my hon. Friend. It may not be a great surprise, but it will be a surprise none the less.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend may not be aware that he is illustrating the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) in introducing his Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister responded to the previous intervention by saying that he was in order. That seems similar to the legal approach which is taken at present to safety in public places. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea seeks to share useful information with members of the public who have an interest in it. That seems roughly what my hon. Friend the Minister is turning his attention to, after a speech of three quarters of an hour in which he has given way several times to those who sought to make him focus on the purpose and the short title of the Bill.

Mr. Forth: As ever, I am grateful for the guidance that I am receiving from behind me. It is almost like being under the tutelage of a back-seat driver, to use a recent analogy. I shall do my best to please my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham, but I hope that he will allow me to approach the matter in my own way. I wish to make several points. I will speed up my delivery, if that will help him. I have a great deal of ground to cover and—good Lord!—time is getting on.

Even assuming that the procedure to which I have just referred—I shall not repeat it because that would be regarded as——

Mr. Spearing: Tedious repetition.

Mr. Forth: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

We have established that when the hazard was discovered, two days would pass before the information was put on the register. Three days would pass before the public safety notice was displayed, but in the meantime the conscientious occupier or operator might have remedied the problem. So the register might say that there was a hazard when the premises had been put right.

The Bill says that the occupier could not remove the notice until the authority had given permission in writing. That implies that there would be a mechanism to make sure that the entry had been corrected. Already we can see the problems that would arise, even from the streamlined procedure which my hon. Friend suggested. There must be a process whereby a serious threat would be identified and notified to the local authority directly or indirectly. The local authority would then put it on the register. A monitoring procedure would be necessary and the statutory authority would have to satisfy itself that the threat had been lifted. I suggest that in many cases the threat might be removed quickly—perhaps the same day or a day or two later.

A procedure would have to be in place to make sure that the register was maintained up to date. Once it was established that the threat had been removed and the notice could be lifted, the register would have to be purged of that entry. It is possible that there would be problems of discontinuity between the threat to the public arising, and being identified, notified and corrected. In the meantime the local authority would be struggling to maintain the register sufficiently up to date so that it was not positively misleading to the public, not to say damaging or dangerous to the business affected.

Mr. Bowis *rose*——

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend wish to guide me?

Mr. Bowis: If I may. The safety authority, as it already does every day of the week, would perceive risks, draw them to the attention of the occupier and make sure that action was taken. The only difference that the Bill would introduce is that the public would be alerted to the risk. No great bureaucratic machine would be added to the health or safety authority. The Bill is simply a request that the authority informs the public and the council.

Mr. Forth: That part of my hon. Friend's argument is correct. I am concentrating more on what would happen at the local authority end. A number of hon. Members have said today that they dispute whether the additional burden on local authorities would be significant. I am trying to make suggestions about the phasing of the operation. I have already conceded his streamlined procedure to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea. I broke my own rule because I said at the beginning that I would talk about the Bill as printed. If I were to dwell on my hon. Friend's point, that would be an even lengthier and rather tedious procedure. However, in the generous mood in which I now find myself, we can leave that to one side.

I do not wish to let slip a point about the maintenance of the register if it is to be of any use to the public or to have any effect on them. We should need to ensure that information was recorded accurately. More importantly, we should need to ensure that when the information was no longer appropriate, it was removed from the register. That part of the burden on local government would be substantial and there is no getting away from that.

[Mr. Forth]

In the privacy of the Chamber, I must say that, although my admiration for officials is second to none, I suspect that with the ingenuity of officials in local government, they would find a way to make this a pretty heavy-handed and bureaucratic procedure one way or the other and that we should end up with something quite elaborate and rather Rolls-Royce when maintaining the register, if it is to have the importance that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea suggests.

There is another important matter about which the House should know. No hon. Member has mentioned the subject of appeals this morning. Under similar legislation covering similar areas, there is an appeals procedure. The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 is an example. Under that Act, where a notice is served because of a serious risk of personal injury, appeals can be lodged within a set time span of the notice being served, although that appeal has no effect on a notice that remains valid during that period.

The question that arises is whether we envisage an appeals mechanism under the Bill. Such a procedure is not contained in the Bill at present. I think that I am right in saying that in his introductory speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea conceded that there should be such a procedure. I welcome that, but I must say that if we now build into the Bill an appeals mechanism, it raises other questions of delays and resources—or it may do. That is properly a matter for the Committee to consider.

However, it is right on Second Reading that the House pauses and considers whether we envisage that an appeals procedure would be appropriate, with all the effects that it might have on the public and on business undertakings. No hon. Member has picked up that point. I do not know whether they accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea suggested and we have no means of knowing. However, it is important for us at least to acknowledge that the Committee might decide to build an appeals procedure into the Bill, so we should have to identify the way in which it worked, which body would hear the appeals and the time scale involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea is about to help us.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend may not have heard me earlier. I said, and I based my remarks on the helpful advice of his officials, that we would use the appeals procedure in relevant Acts that relate to the statutory authorities that would be listed in the Bill. The procedures are all there. If there were unreasonable delays, it would be because there are unreasonable delays now.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for clarifying the matter to the House. He has also helped us because he has said that he wants to look positively at the suggestion that the Bill should include a schedule of authorities to be covered. He and I discussed that and we felt that it was an area of doubt in the Bill. My hon. Friend's remarks will give the Committee some guidance.

I do not want to dwell on the appeals procedure. The enforcement of the procedure is also important. There would have to be enforcement of the terms of the public warning notices either by the statutory authorities—I presume that they would take on most of that role—or, in some cases, by the local authorities. There would have to be a procedure, although I am not sure that it would be very different from those that exist at present. As the existing procedures cover most of what we want to do, I should have thought that that point would be covered fairly adequately.

We must not forget to mention the burdens on the private sector—the business and wealth-creating sector. I have responsibility for small businesses as well as responsibility for health and safety and other matters at the Department of Employment and I have a passing interest in the effects that some of the Bill's provisions might have on small businesses. I do not want to over-emphasise that, because many of the existing provisions and procedures already in force probably have similar effects, but I thought that the House would want to be aware of that issue before deciding whether to give the Bill a Second Reading.

I have already mentioned briefly that we should have to return to other matters when considering the Bill further. Those issues include the definition of the enforcing authorities, coverage of the local authorities, whether or not the security provision in clause 1(4) would need to be redrafted, which it probably would, and the difficulties that arise in the detailed provisions of the notices' dimensions and other matters. Those are all matters of detail that would have to be considered subsequently.

There are also some difficulties surrounding the applicability of the Bill to Northern Ireland. I am advised that, as the Bill is a transferred matter, under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 the Bill should not extend to Northern Ireland—as is the case with so many Bills. Therefore, if the Bill were to become law, consideration would have to be given to a separate Northern Ireland Order in Council. I said that almost in passing, although we must never forget the different and unique requirements of Northern Ireland when legislating. The House should be aware that we would have to address that issue.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister has been giving the House considerable detail of the matters that we would need to look at if the principle of the Bill was agreed by the House. Will he help the House by stating whether he will give it the opportunity to make a decision on Second Reading?

Mr. Forth: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not a matter for me. It is for the House of Commons to decide whether to give a measure its Second Reading.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister give us the opportunity?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman knows that the House may vote on the substance of a measure on Second Reading, as it did last Friday, or it may be required to show its support for a measure by the requisite number of people being present in the House at 2.30 pm. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House longer than I and knows that.

Mr. Ashton: The Minister has spoken for an hour on a two-page Bill, covering points that could easily have been made and tabled as amendments in Committee. He must be in a position to say whether he will allow a Second Reading or talk out the Bill.

Mr. Forth: I find these questions strange— *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are beginning to get

slightly agitated. I am delighted to see them coming in to hear my closing sentences. All that they are doing is prolonging my time at the Dispatch Box.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand that a telephone call has been received from someone in a village called Dodder Hill in Mid-Worcestershire. A man has rung in to say that his Member of Parliament is called Mr. Eric Forth. The man wanted another hon. Member to get up in the House of Commons and object to the fact that his Member of Parliament was trying to block a Bill that was important to the people of Worcestershire. I wonder whether the Member for that constituency might be prepared to grant this gentleman's wish and give the House a chance to vote on the Bill——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. We have not obtained high technology yet at the Chair; I have no mobile telephone. That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If a man makes the effort to ring the House from a little village in the Minister's constituency, he is clearly very upset. The Minister can respond to his request that he give the Bill the chance of going into Committee. I appeal to the Minister——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that if the Minister were allowed to make progress, he would make his position clear.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is just conceivable that the matter is connected with what happened at 11.30 am, before you took the Chair, when I happened to tell Mr. Speaker, who was in the Chair, that the Minister was going to talk out this Bill. Mr. Speaker was not aware of that, and, since you know no more about the man from the Minister's constituency than I do, it is just possible that he may have heard what I said and wanted to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the debate should be stopped and the Bill allowed to go through——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Forth.

Mr. Forth: Labour Members are trying to prolong our proceedings and I find that disgraceful. I am always interested in views allegedly expressed by my constituents, of whom I have 85,000, and my job as a Member of Parliament is to judge what they think. The gentleman referred to is only one of 85,000 and, although his view is important, I shall make my own judgment in these matters, as the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) would expect.

I was just coming to the conclusion of my remarks before this disgraceful effort by Opposition Members to prolong proceedings. I cannot imagine why they want to do that, but what they have said is on the record——

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Many of us who have been here throughout the debate know that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) was here for the private notice question but not otherwise, and the same applies to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is about time we made progress with the proposed legislation.

Mr. Forth: I agree, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Although I well understand the motivation behind my hon. Friend's bringing forward this Bill and although he has been amply and ably supported in a number of heartfelt speeches, I have tried to set out my views and those of the Government. We are not persuaded that the Bill would make the contribution to public safety that is claimed by its supporters. We believe that the costs of introducing the Bill as printed would be heavier than has been suggested, for the reasons that I have given. We believe that existing provisions in the law, which have partly come about as a result of the tragedies described earlier, have led to significant improvements in our ability to respond to such accidents. And we believe that taking into account the Bill's likely contribution to public health and safety on the one hand and the costs and difficulties associated with it on the other, it will not, on balance, be beneficial. Of course, I shall listen to other contributions and then see how the House decides to proceed.

2.13 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on his success and on the Bill, in so far as it demonstrates his belief in the value of greater publicity and discussion of safety matters. He has shown that he has considerable faith in the effect of informed public opinion on these matters and that he wants to give greater publicity to the risks inherent in the activities concerned.

The debate has certainly achieved a useful discussion of safety and has drawn attention to a number of statutory responsibilities of which some hon. Members were unaware before this morning. We must look at the mechanism that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea has selected for the Bill and ask whether it will achieve the objects that have been canvassed for it. Will it bring about any improvement or does it contain risks of detracting from the clarity of existing statutory responsibility? It is important for the House to bear it in mind that the Bill deals with cases in which the relevant safety authority will have determined that there is substantial threat or danger to the health or safety of the public. When such a situation arises and the authority has given that warning, the Bill contemplates a period of at least 28 days before the notice which is referred to could be exhibited.

Mr. Bowis: I do not know whether my hon. and learned Friend was here when I set out the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Ground: I was.

Mr. Bowis: In that case, my hon. and learned Friend will have heard me say that the Bill does not propose that procedure. We have a much simpler measure. My hon. and learned Friend says that he is concerned to see that the detail is right. I hope that he will join us in Committee and help to get it right.

Mr. Ground: The Bill deals with very serious cases that the statutory authority has upgraded as sufficiently serious to go as far as to say that there is a substantial threat or danger to the public. I am not satisfied from the debate that the Bill's provisions would have avoided any of the disasters about which hon. Members have spoken. Mr. Justice Hidden identified the cause of the Clapham disaster as faulty wiring during signal modernisation. In such a case the Bill would have operated only when the railways

[Mr. Ground]

inspectorate had decided that there was a substantial threat or danger to the safety of the public. There was no such decision or warning and, therefore, the Bill could not have provided an antidote to that case.

In the case of the Zeebrugge disaster the internal memorandum containing the warning was a company document and dealt with the need for a warning light on the bow door. That would not have come to light under the Bill. The Zeebrugge disaster has been referred to many times in the debate and hon. Members have referred to press comments. The House must bear in mind that a jury has just acquitted the ferry company, all its responsible officers and the ship's officers of manslaughter. That decision must undermine many of the glib comments in the press about that disaster.

Mr. Forth: My hon. and learned Friend emphasises a point that I hope I was able to make clear in my brief contribution. It is to make sure that the House understands that the Bill deals with matters that are dealt with by statutory authorities in the course of their duties. It does not cover and was not designed to cover internal memoranda or other documents of the kind to which my hon. and learned Friend has referred. It is important for the House to understand that before deciding how to deal with the Bill, because much of the support for the Bill may well be misplaced.

Mr. Ground: I am not satisfied that the Bill would effect any improvement in the law and there are some risks about it. If a responsible authority identifies a major danger, that authority should exercise its responsibility and take immediate action to remove the danger or deal with it. We should not be relying on public information.

Mr. Bowis: I should make it clear, as my hon. Friend the Minister made it clear, that the Bill has nothing to do with culpability in law. It is to do with the triggering of a mechanism for public information on a perceived safety risk. My hon. and learned Friend is right to say that the history of the Herald of Free Enterprise tragedy would not have been affected by the provisions of the Bill. One hopes that if such a case were to happen again, the captains, the marine unions or some bodies with responsibility for safety would bring the problem to the attention of the marine safety authority, which would then set in train the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Ground: There are statutory authorities with responsibility for safety in all the sectors about which we are concerned. Such authorities have the necessary powers to take action, as the Minister has said. In the case of Bradford, there was a fire authority and now there are other authorities that can take action. I am concerned that the Bill may discourage statutory authorities from taking action under their responsibilities and putting an end to a danger.

If, in certain sectors, there is not a relevant safety authority with the necessary powers to act, the House should provide those necessary powers. I support that in principle, but I do not support the fobbing off of those responsibilities on to the public, who, in most cases, would not know what to make of the warnings.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. and learned Gentleman has made a significant point. As he says that he would support a suitable amendment, will he allow us to debate the matter in Committee? I assure him that my hon. Friends will support him if he tables reasonable amendments in Committee. In the light of that undertaking, will he take his place? I understand that his constituents in Feltham and Heston may want the Bill to go into Committee. Will he not respond to that?

Mr. Ground: I shall speak about the effect on my constituency later, because the Bill has potentially far-reaching effects on my constituency and on the airlines and other businesses which operate there. The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood me. I was saying that there are bodies with clear statutory responsibilities and duties in all the matters touched on in the debate. The relevant authority has power to take immediate action where there is a significant risk to public health or safety. I do not want to discourage authorities from exercising that responsibility.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): For many decades, the House has accepted the principle that a private Member's Bill could be sent to Committee to be amended, provided that the original central structure of the Bill met the general mood of the House. I have great sympathy with what my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and other sponsors have in mind in the Bill, but I doubt whether that applies in this case.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Doubt?

Mr. Dykes: I am being polite. I should not be tempted to respond to a sedentary interruption, but with my characteristic politeness I am using the word "doubt". The Bill's bureaucratic structure is the characteristic which deters even those hon. Members in all parts of the House who sympathise with its ultimate aims.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) and I share many things in common, but we also represent the two largest constituencies in greater London, which means that many of our constituents are very interested——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is tending to make a speech, rather than an intervention.

Mr. Dykes: I did not mean to incur your displeasure, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I had to make that point, in agreeing with my hon. and learned Friend—albeit reluctantly, and with some sadness—that the bureaucracy embodied in the Bill is unacceptable.

Mr. Ground: I thank my hon. Friend——

Mr. Bowis *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put:—

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 50, Noes 0.

Division No. 62] **[2. 25 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Cox, Tom
Anderson, Donald	Crowther, Stan
Ashton, Joe	Dixon, Don
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Dobson, Frank
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Boateng, Paul	Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Bowis, John	Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Golding, Mrs Llin
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*

Haynes, Frank
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Knox, David
Lawrence, Ivan
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Meale, Alan
Mowlam, Marjorie
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Pendry, Tom
Primarolo, Dawn
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Bottomley and
Mr. Gerald Bermingham.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Hugh Dykes and
Mr. Steve Norris.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Fewer than 100 Members having voted for the Ayes, the Question is not decided in the affirmative.

Debate to be resumed on Friday next.

It being after half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a tradition of the House that the vote shall follow the voice. The only voice that cried no against the closure was that of the Minister, not the Whip, yet nobody voted no. There must be something wrong with that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I shall certainly not name the hon. Members who called out no, but they are in the Chamber at present. It was quite clear that they were the hon. Members who opposed.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. My copy of the Bill has on it the name of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris). I understood that, from where he was standing, he was a Teller opposing the further progress of the Bill. That seems to be inconsistent.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is certainly not a matter for the Chair which hon. Members are determined to be Tellers and which hon. Members are supporters of Bills.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a matter of personal explanation, I am sure that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who questioned my role in today's proceedings, will appreciate that, had my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) not been able to call a Division, he would not have had the opportunity for his Bill to succeed. As there were no other persons present in this Chamber who were prepared to be Tellers for the Noes, I undertook that obligation to ensure that my hon. Friend had that opportunity.

Private Members' Bills

REGISTERED HOMES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 40 (Committal of Bills).

TRADE DESCRIPTIONS (ANIMAL TESTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till 22 March.

GREYHOUND BETTING LEVY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

WRITTEN CONSTITUTION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

HOUSING (HOMELESS PERSONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not printed. Second Reading what day? No day named.

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE ARBITRATION, PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

PROTECTION OF BADGERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (PUBLICITY FOR AUDITORS' REPORTS) BILL

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 40 (Committal of Bills).

ROAD TRAFFIC (RANDOM BREATH TESTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not printed.

DOMESTIC SMOKE ALARMS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

Waiting Lists (North East Thames)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.41 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I have asked for this Adjournment debate following the leaking to *The Guardian* of a letter sent by Mr. Terry Hunt, the regional manager of North East Thames regional health authority, or NETHRA as it is fondly known, to district managers in the region.

In the letter, Mr. Hunt addresses the problems of NETHRA's huge waiting list, which is the worst for its size in the country, on which no fewer than 65,744 people are waiting for operations. More than 22,109 people have waited for more than a year, which in itself is scandalous.

Among Mr. Hunt's proposals for reducing the waiting list is one that deserves the attention of the whole country as it marks a departure from the principles on which many of us had believed our national health service is based. He proposes that a list of medical conditions are to be

"deemed inappropriate to place on waiting lists in the future."

In other words, those medical conditions will no longer be available for treatment under the national health service.

The conditions to be excluded include varicose vein operations, lumps and bumps, wisdom teeth without symptoms and in vitro fertilisation, unless, he says,

"there is an overriding clinical need."

We are told that other conditions may be added to that list.

The Government repeatedly assure us of their support for the founding principles of the NHS, yet, because of a lack of funding, the principle of a universal and comprehensive health service available to all is being formally abandoned in NETHRA.

I want the Minister to tell the House whether that is Government policy and, if not, what she intends to do about it. Is she prepared to see the NHS become merely a first-aid service or does she believe, as I do, that it should be a comprehensive service? Other questions need to be asked about this decision. Who made it? Who was consulted? Were the community health councils consulted about this major change in policy? Would we have known about it had there not been a leak to a national newspaper?

On the face of it, the decision appears to have been made secretly by an NHS bureaucrat. Bureaucracy in the NHS has largely been abandoned, but it cannot be right that a decision of such significance can be covertly concocted and carried through without scrutiny and behind the closed doors of NHS management.

There are several clinical and social concerns about the list of excluded treatments. Let us consider the example of non-malignant lumps and bumps. A doctor has written to a national newspaper about his concerns. He asks:

"How will anyone know that lumps are benign if they are not to be treated—and will people cease to seek medical opinion on life threatening conditions once they hear that lumps will no longer be treated by the NHS? Furthermore, there are many lumps and bumps which might not need removing or treating for medical reasons but which are socially and physically disabling nonetheless."

I am reminded in particular of one of my constituents who has a lump on her foot. It causes her considerable pain and she had hoped to have it removed. She is a carer. Her husband is suffering from cancer and it is making life

even more difficult for her. When her GP referred her to North Middlesex hospital, she was refused treatment because of that new policy, which is quite disgraceful.

Had I the time, I could run through the other prohibited conditions to show that there are similar good, preventive and social reasons why they should remain available through the national health service. However, I shall confine myself to saying how cruel it is to deny women the right to IVF treatment on the NHS. I should like the Minister to visit my constituent Mrs. W. and explain to her why she cannot have IVF treatment. She has been trying to have a child for seven years and had finally begun pre-treatment for IVF. After many months of taking pills she is distraught because she has been told that she will not now receive the treatment.

Mr. Hunt's decision also raises the issue of the relationship between the NHS and the private health sector. It is no coincidence that the private hospitals are thriving on exactly the sort of work that North-East Thames regional health authority is now abandoning. Is it part of Government policy to encourage the private sector by starving the NHS? That is what it is beginning to look like to my constituents.

The trouble is that very few of my constituents can afford to pay £1,000 to have their varicose veins treated or the thousands of pounds involved in having private IVF treatment. To them, Mr. Hunt's ruling means that they will never be able to have the treatment that they need. Frankly, I shudder to think what other treatments will be added to the list. We are going down a very dangerous road when income is the determinant of whether one receives treatment.

I have no doubt that the Minister will reply that the NHS is not funded from a bottomless purse and that priorities must be established. No one would quibble about that or with the need to find constantly more efficient ways to run the NHS. However, Mr. Hunt's decision is a panic measure taken against the background of chronic starvation of funds by the Government to the health authority. It is bringing the NHS in the region to its knees. As elsewhere, managers are struggling to run an underfunded service and at the same time responding to political pressure to keep the waiting lists down by manipulating the figures—in time, no doubt, for a general election.

In the North East Thames regional health authority areas people will not be deceived. In 1989-90, 28,514 operations were cancelled, with a record 8,095 operating sessions not taking place. We have lost 31 hospitals since 1979 and a further 16 have been partially closed. In the same period we have lost 3,295 acute beds.

This year figures will certainly be far worse. Of 28 districts in the regional authority, 13 are making cuts in excess of £1 million this year, including 10 inner London districts, as a result of the foolish insistence of Ministers that they clear all debts before the start of the remodelled NHS in April.

In my district of Haringey, 75,149 people were waiting for operations in March 1990, 31 per cent. of whom had been waiting over a year. That is quite appalling. Yet by August the district was overspent and it has had to find ways of containing a projected £1·8 million overspend in the current year. That meant the closure of the orthopaedic theatre at St. Ann's hospital before Christmas and the closure of the orthopaedic ward at St. Ann's at the beginning of January this year. The work has been moved to the North Middlesex hospital, and the operating time reduced to one half-day session a week, with beds having to be shared with general surgery, which is severely limiting the progress of the general surgery waiting list. The 18-bed infectious diseases ward at St. Ann's has also been closed, to be replaced only by six beds at the North Middlesex. In all, three wards have closed, one operating theatre has been lost, and the building that was supposed to replace the facilities at St. Ann's has been cancelled due to capital shortages.

In October surgeons were told to reduce operations by 50 per cent. and then on 1 December they were told to halt all non-elective surgery altogether until 1 April 1991. I suggest that it will take some skilful manipulation of the figures to disguise the massive increase in the waiting list which will result.

Figures are one thing, but the effect on patients and their families is another. I receive scores of letters from people who are affected by the problem. Let us take, for example, the case of Mr. James Breslin who lives in my constituency. He is 63 and needs a hip replacement badly so that he can continue to work to pay his exorbitant mortgage. After waiting many months he was finally given a date of 16 March 1991. He has now been told that the operation has been cancelled, and that he must expect at least another six months' delay. Mr. Breslin's daughter wrote to me last month and I quote from her letter:

"He doesn't know yet—we are afraid to tell him. He is in constant excruciating pain. It is terrible to watch him, his face contorts with agony when he tries to get up or sit down, and when he tries to walk. I am afraid of what this news will do to him—the only thing keeping him going was the fact that 16th March was growing nearer. Please help my father."

When I wrote to the surgeon, he could only explain that Mr. Breslin was one of 52 of his patients who would not be operated on until next year and many of them had had their operations cancelled twice. He said that it was impossible to plan elective surgery.

In NETHRA, there are thousands of people like Mr. Breslin, who are being short-changed by the NHS. According to the Greater London Association of Community Health Councils, which does such excellent work to represent the views of health service users, with such limited resources, the situation in NETHRA is approaching chaos in many parts of the region.

Districts such as Haringey can no longer look to other neighbouring authorities to tide them over difficult periods, for they are all in the same boat. The picture is one of wards being closed and beds being left empty while people are crying out for the treatment that they so badly need. I am reliably informed of an instance recently when cardiac patients at Bart's were put in armchairs for the day, because emergency medical admissions needed their beds. In the region as a whole, emergency admissions are rocketing and patients are being denied operations until their condition necessitates their admission to hospital on an emergency basis.

I began by expressing my concern about the abandonment of the fundamental principles of the NHS, as exemplified by the decision by the managment of NETHRA to abandon certain kinds of treatment. I should like the Minister to state the principles on which the NHS is currently operating. I hope that she will not attempt to pull the wool over our eyes by quoting bogus statistics to demonstrate that matters are improving. They most definitely are not.

[Mr. Bernie Grant]

The NHS was created in the spirit of universalism which followed the second world war. I end by quoting from another letter which I recently received, from a pensioner in Tottenham who has also had his operation cancelled and who fought in that war. He wrote:

"I am now wondering what the hell I fought for."

Does the Minister intend to allow our service men and women now fighting in the Gulf to be left asking themselves the same question?

2.53 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this opportunity to discuss the position in his health authority and, particularly, to clarify several important points causing great anxiety in the North East Thames regional health authority. The hon. Gentleman has raised questions about the health service on several occasions in the House. We respect and understand his interest and anxiety. That anxiety is shared by the Government. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are determined to ensure that we use the record resources going into the health service and the record number of people working in it to provide a high standard of care of the people of Britain.

The hon. Gentleman began by asking me about the principles of the national health service and whether we held to the essential founding principles. I can give him an unequivocal assurance that the national health service is, and will remain, available to all, free at the point of delivery, financed largely out of taxation and funded to a record level that many would have thought inconceivable only 10 years ago. That is so, with regard to not only the numbers of people working in the service and the way in which they are paid, but the knowledge, the pharamaceuticals and the technology available to the hon. Gentleman's constituents and to mine. However, it is precisely because of the growing and developing nature of medical care that we cannot avoid change. We need to rationalise and to develop the ways in which we provide care.

The hon. Gentleman referred several times to bed closures and to hospital closures. It is a simplistic view of the health service to regard it as primarily concerned with beds. It is primarily concerned with patient care. We must always get the balance right between the provision of acute care and operations, which are enormously important to those who need them, and the broader care—the community care—and the services for the priority groups, such as the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped.

A distinguishing feature of our national health service, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, is the family doctor service. I hope that he will set the way in which that services has developed in recent years in his constituency alongside his concerns about acute care, with which I shall deal in a moment. In the hon. Gentleman's family practitioner committee area—now the family health services authority area—there are now three times as many practice nurses as there were three years ago. Over the past 10 years, there has been a fall of more than 100 in the number of patients on the average GP list in his constituency. There has also been an increase of 13 per cent. in the number of GPs in his family health services authority area and there have been great developments in the care provided by the hospitals in his area.

I will give an example about which the hon. Gentleman will wish to tell his constituents. Between 1988 and 1990, the number of day cases undertaken by the major hospital in his area increased by nearly 50 per cent. That is an achievement of which to be proud. Only recently, the Audit Commission took a number of health authorities to task for the lack of speed with which they had moved towards day cases. There has been an increase of about 60 per cent. in London as a whole, which is excellent, but the hon. Gentleman's area has done particularly well.

It is not our intention to put people into beds and leave them there indefinitely, but to use the resources to the full to provide better care. That certainly applies to operating theatres. The recent Bevan report dealt with the essential need to use operating theatres to the full. The hon. Gentleman said that operations had been cancelled, but "cancelled" is not the right word. Some have been postponed for a variety of reasons, the lack of validation of a list and the lack of proper planning to ensure that staff would be available. Sometimes emergencies have occurred and the non-urgent cases have been put back. Alongside that, about 10 per cent. of patients do not show up for their appointments.

We must ensure that the national health service manages its services effectively and that the public and the patients realise that it is not a cost-free service. It may be free at the point of use for our constituents, but next year costs will approach £30 billion. The onus is on all of us to ensure that we understand the range of resources brought together through the work of the district health authority and the family health services authority and integrated under the umbrella of the region. We must ensure that we evaluate and monitor our work to continue to push forward the frontiers.

The hon. Gentleman has centred the debate around a letter sent out by the regional general manager of the North East Thames regional health authority. I welcome the opportunity to clarify the matter. The idea that the letter was leaked is fanciful. It was a routine letter, which I have with me, and there is no question of its being confidential or private. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can confirm that there is no mention of its being secret, confidential or private. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify the issue. Duncan Nichol, the chief executive of the national health service management executive, has written to all regions to put the position more clearly. In order that there should be no misunderstanding, I intend to place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House. Misunderstanding and mischief often lead to unjustified anxieties among patients.

Waiting lists and waiting times are important in terms of the length of time an individual waits, rather than the exact number on the waiting list. We have made it clear that we want action to be taken on the long waits. Our health service treats patients according to clinical priority so that 50 per cent. of patients are admitted immediately because they are urgent or emergency cases. Of the 50 per cent. of patients who are not admitted immediately, half are admitted within five weeks, so three quarters of all patients are admitted immediately or within five weeks. We share the hon. Gentleman's concern about those who are not admitted within that time scale and for whom there are sometimes unacceptable delays. Inevitably, there are the ones who do not require urgent, acute operations. The

hon. Gentleman will know that it causes anxiety and uncertainty to the patients and their families if it is not certain when they will be admitted.

The number of patients waiting more than a year reduced by nearly 7 per cent. in the year to 31 March 1990, and provisional figures show that that downward trend is continuing. The North East Thames authority has bettered those figures—there has been a reduction of long-wait patients of 28 per cent. In the year to 31 March, provisional figures show that the region's figures are continuing the downward trend. I am pleased to see the great strides being made in the region in terms of dealing with long-wait patients especially since, as the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the North East Thames authority has had a particular problem with the number of such patients.

In the district health authority covering the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Haringey, the period from March 1989 to 31 December 1990 saw a 35 per cent. decrease in the total number of in-patients waiting, so the authority has done particularly well in recognising and meeting that challenge. In the year ending March 1990, Haringey reduced the number of in-patients waiting more than a year from 842 to 385—a 54 per cent. reduction. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to join me in congratulating Haringey health authority on so clearly and strongly identifying that problem as one needing action. However, there is room for more action. That is why the management executive and the Secretary of State have identified long waits as a special priority in the health service.

We have been working with the special waiting list fund. During the past five years we have spent £154 million to enable hundreds of thousands of extra patients to be from the waiting lists. Next year, £35 million will be allocated to health authorities from that fund, and the regions will supplement that with a further £25 million from their own resources. The North East Thames authority, which covers the hon. Gentleman's area, will be allocated £2·63 million from the fund, which the authority will match, making a total of £5·26 million.

It is not just a case of increasing resources, but of increasing efficiency. I have spoken about the importance of validating the lists, of some of the administrative tasks which need to be undertaken and also of clinical validation.

The aspect that the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) mentions applies to clinical validation. It is important for clinicians to examine the list, to check and to satisfy themselves that the people on it are in need of surgical treatment. I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that there is the world of difference between a varicose vein which may be unsightly, but is not troubling a gentleman who wears long trousers all day and causes him no pain or difficulty, and a varicose vein which is extremely unsightly, possibly ulcerated, or causing great difficulty. Similarly there is a difference between a tattoo which can be seen by no one and, although disliked by the patient, cannot be said to be causing distress or pain and a tattoo which causes great psychological distress and is a source of great concern. Wisdom teeth can be in need of clinical attention and can cause pain and difficulties to the patient, but patients may also simply wish that they did not have wisdom teeth although there is no clinical need for their removal.

North East Thames regional health authority was seeking to identify a range of operations where districts and, especially, clinicians would wish to satisfy themselves about the clinical aspects. It would be quite wrong to think that that list constituted a prohibition on those operations—on the contrary—but a need has been identified to check on the clinical need for such operations.

Mr. Bernie Grant: If the Minister is saying that this is not a definitive list, has she instituted some sort of appeals mechanism so that if, for example a clinician says that an operation is not urgent, the patient's doctor and other evidence can be brought before some sort of appeals committee?

Mrs. Bottomley: In our national health service patients are always admitted to hospital on the basis of clinical need. We do not have a waiting list in the formal sense that the first person on the list is the first person seen. That is why 50 per cent. of people are admitted to hospital immediately and a further 50 per cent. within five weeks. Some of those patients admitted immediately, or within five weeks, will get to hospital much sooner than people who have been on the list for longer. However, their clinical need and priority are greater. They are in need of urgent attention and have a deteriorating or a life-threatening condition.

The key point about the letter from the general manager of the regional health authority, spelt out even more clearly by the letter from Duncan Nichol, which I hope that the hon. Gentleman will read carefully, is the requirement to establish clinical need in those areas. I quote briefly from the letter:

> "It is important that we do not create the impression that the NHS is seeking by blanket managerial declaration, to rule out whole categories of treatment . . . without reference to the clinical priority of individual patients."

I hope that the hon. Member for Tottenham will be at pains to explain that to his constituents and more widely.

It is important to continue to validate lists and to ensure that we provide the sort of pioneering health care which is a feature of our national health service. For example, last weekend we were all concerned about the well-being of the child Tamara Rainey at Addenbrooke's hospital—a child in acute need. Our national health service is able to provide treatment at the frontiers of science. We can continue to provide such treatment, free and available to all, if we use our resources effectively and well.

We must see, for example, whether GPs can undertake some minor treatments because GPs are now increasingly involved in minor surgery. We must ensure that the family health services authority and the district health authorities work together effectively and comprehensively. We must ensure that we do not think only in terms of acute medicine and the importance of tackling waiting lists. We must also remember those, such as the mentally handicapped and geriatrics, who require care in the community. Although it is costly, we all want to see better standards of care for such people.

The constituents of the hon. Member for Tottenham have seen the establishment of the North Middlesex hospital as a first-wave NHS trust. The hon. Gentleman will find that to be a centre of excellence able to provide better care and to inspire great confidence among his constituents. I hope that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman and his constituents and I thank him again for allowing me to explain these matters.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 11 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY (No. 2) BILL

(By Order)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 12 February at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Airline Passengers

1. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his response to the representations of British Midland and other carriers about the decline in passengers carried as a result of the Gulf war.

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): We have received no representations from British Midland.

Mr. Dalyell: Given the many empty seats on aircraft as a result of the Gulf war and instructions from some famous companies in this country that their executives should not travel by air, do the Government intend to pass by on the other side of the road the first time a major carrier encounters financial difficulties and just say, "Hard luck, it is because of the Gulf war"?

Mr McLoughlin: That is a purely hypothetical question as we have had no such requests. If such a request is made, we shall listen and talk to the company involved.

Mr. Soames: Has my hon. Friend had time to see the proposals apparently emanating from the European Commission to provide subsidies for state-owned airlines which would put British Airways—now in the private sector—at a considerable disadvantage? Does my hon. Friend agree that such behaviour by the European Community would be profoundly unsatisfactory?

Mr. McLoughlin: We must be careful to look exactly at what Sir Leon Brittan said. He said that if

"airlines are to receive subsidies from their Governments, the details will have to be notified to the Commission. We will consider each case rapidly but will have to ensure that competition is not unduly distorted to the detriment of consumers and of airlines whose Governments do not think that giving subsidies is an appropriate response to current problems."

That is satisfactory to the Government.

Traffic Calming

2. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new initiatives he is planning to increase the use of traffic-calming measures.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): Current initiatives include the new road humps regulations, 20 mph zones and the recently published urban safety management guidelines.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that, in addition to reducing the number of road casualties by between 15 and 30 per cent., speed-calming measures have the great advantage of recivilising the centres of many towns and villages by removing from them the menace of fast-moving traffic? However, we are not enjoying the full advantages of that due to certain ambiguities in the law about vertical and horizontal alignments. When will the Department clarify the position?

Mr. Chope: I cannot give precise dates, but the Department's lawyers are considering the issue to see whether clarification of the law is necessary.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my hon. Friend aware that, particularly in the current bad weather, the least calming feature of our roads is the outrageous exceeding of the speed limit by heavy goods vehicles? If, therefore, as earlier reported, my hon. Friend plans to reduce the speed of HGVs, that is to be welcomed. Will my hon. Friend also consider confiscation of vehicles that break the law? That would have a salutary effect on irresponsible employers.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that suggestion. Last Thursday we issued a consultation paper which, when implemented, will ensure that new heavy goods vehicles would have to to be fitted with limiters so that they could not exceed the maximum speed limit, as many do at present. In the prevailing weather conditions, many vehicles are going far in excess of an appropriate speed even though they may be within the speed limit.

Network SouthEast

3. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss Network SouthEast.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): This Thursday.

Mr. Burns: Does my hon. Friend accept that, despite the improvements on the Liverpool to Chelmsford line in the past four years, many of my constituents are still concerned about the quality and standard of the service on that line? When my hon. Friend next meets the chairman of British Rail, will he explain to him that many of my constituents believe that British Rail should be legally bound to compensate those who have to put up with delays and an unacceptable level of service which are not due to adverse weather conditions or vandalism?

Mr. Freeman: I am aware of the problems on the line to which my hon. Friend referred. Indeed, I visited his constituency with him to learn of the problems first hand. Compensation for failure to deliver services properly is a matter for British Rail, not for Ministers. As a general

principle, the Government believe that fare increases in real terms should come into play only when there has been an improvement in the quality of service.

Mr. Spearing: May I draw the Minister's attention to British Rail's proposal to withdraw guards from trains on Network SouthEast, particularly on the dense network of commuter lines on the southern region? Will he read the speeches made on this topic in the debate on the Public Safety Information Bill last Friday and will he assure the House that the savings achieved by such a method have nothing to do with Government pressures on Network SouthEast? Will he let me know what proportion of savings in train movements such policies will achieve?

Mr. Freeman: I shall be glad to write to the hon. Gentleman with the information that he requests. I can give him the assurance that he seeks. Driver-only operation on the south-western lines, for instance, will not jeopardise safety but will enable more trains to be run. British Rail is suffering from a severe labour shortage and cannot recruit and retain drivers and guards. With driver-only operation and the completion of resignalling at Waterloo, constituencies served by British Rail in that quadrant of London will get a better and safer service.

Mr. Dunn: When my hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Rail, will he undertake to express the great concern of my constituents who were so adversely affected by the poor services offered by Network SouthEast at the end of last week and over the weekend? Will he make it plain that in 1991, snow on the line, frozen points and the quality of the snow itself are not good enough reasons for such poor performance?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and I will draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the chairman's attention. I visited Waterloo and Victoria this morning and learned that about 45 per cent. of Network SouthEast's southern region trains had been running. Although the problems relate to the rolling stock, I share my hon. Friend's concern—and, presumably, the concern of the whole House—that British Rail should find itself in this position with relatively modern rolling stock.

Mr. Tony Banks: To what extent is it the fault of Network SouthEast that, apparently, it is the wrong kind of snow, automatic doors will not open and points get frozen, and to what extent is it the fault of the Government, who have been taking funds away from Newtwork SouthEast? The Government cannot wash their hands of responsibility for something as desperate as the failure of Network SouthEast to meet the natural demands of commuters in the present bad weather.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman's analysis is not right. There is no indication that the serious problems with Network SouthEast services have anything to do with revenue subsidy, investment or pay. The problem appears to be related to the design of the rolling stock, some of which is relatively modern, and the Government and British Rail must learn the lessons of the past few days.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: When my hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Rail, will he remind him that the Brighton line is one of the most profitable in the country and urgently needs new rolling stock? Will my hon. Friend also tell the chairman that last week, in common with many of my constituents, I spent five hours on a train from Victoria to Brighton with no heating, no corridors and no loo?

Mr. Freeman: Much though my hon. Friend may sometimes wish to do so, he will appreciate that he cannot hold Ministers directly responsible for the operation of British Rail. The Government have ensured a significant investment programme. This September, on the Kent inner services—my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) will be one of the beneficiaries of this—400 new coaches and longer platforms are to be introduced. Many other lines—including, for example, the Chiltern services and services to Oxford and Reading—will have new rolling stock. I do not have immediate good news about the Brighton line, but I certainly convey my hon. Friend's views to the chairman of British Rail.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Minister aware that only last week a report from his Department referred to a decline in reliability and punctuality and to carriages being dirtier and more overcrowded than they were last year? That is precisely what the Transport Users Consultative Committee has been saying, and it has linked the situation directly with the fact that the Government have reduced the public service obligation by hundreds of millions of pounds. When will the Minister recognise the connection, reverse that policy and give people in the south-east the chance of a decent railway system?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman raises a number of points, presumably referring to 1989-90, when undoubtedly there were problems of unpunctuality and reliability, caused in part by a series of strikes on British Rail and London Underground. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the public service obligation. The Government firmly believe that it is much better to devote resources to investment than to revenue subsidy. That does not rule out a continuation of revenue subsidy, especially for regional railways, but investment is the key to improving the quality of service.

Channel Tunnel

4. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss connections between the north-west and the channel tunnel.

6. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss through trains from areas north of London to the continent via the channel tunnel following its anticipated completion.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I last discussed channel tunnel services from north of London with the chairman of British Rail on 5 December. My hon. Friend the Minister of State discussed the matter with senior officials of British Rail last week.

Mr. Butler: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that existing connections to the north-west seem unable to cope in cold weather, even when such weather is predicted? When he next meets the chairman of British Rail, will he remind him that on Friday night hundreds of passengers were treated like cattle and waited for hours for

trains that never turned up, without adequate seating and in disgusting dirty conditions? In general, they were treated like muck.

Mr. Rifkind: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the general quality of service. It is important that if circumstances develop outwith the control of British Rail every effort should be made to inform passengers, especially those who are waiting on the platform, about what has gone wrong and the likelihood of their obtaining the rail services that they require so that, if necessary, they can make alternative arrangements.

Mr. Fearn: At a time when rail transport, especially to the north of England, needs to be efficient, does the Minister agree that the lack of direct trains to the continent and the fact that none are presently planned harms tourism in the north and north-west? When he next meets the chairman of British Rail, will he ask whether a special train can go from either Liverpool or Preston direct to the continent?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand that night services are intended from the north-west, but the hon. Gentleman is correct to say that at present British Rail does not propose any day services for that route. It is for British Rail to judge whether there would be sufficient demand for such services. We shall certainly draw to British Rail's attention the view of those who represent constituencies in the north-west that such a service would be useful, but it will be for British Rail to conclude whether the likely demand would justify such a service.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is a great deal of concern about rail connections to the north-west? Will he please tell us exactly what is being done to improve the west coast main line, both now and when the channel tunnel comes into being in 1992?

Mr. Rifkind: Improvement to the west coast main line is in British Rail's programme. My hon. Friend is correct to draw attention to this matter because the major investment by British Rail in electrifying the east coast main line and its proposals for the west coast line are clearly important to all parts of the country north of London if they are to receive maximum benefit when the channel tunnel opens.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Secretary of State break the habit of a lifetime and lay down some transport plans for the future? Will he remember that it is not only British Rail which is responsible when our transport services go wrong? Have the Government no responsibility not only for the lack of planning in relation to freight villages, but for freight traffic and movements between the north-west and the channel tunnel?

Mr. Rifkind: I should have thought that the hon. Lady would be the last to raise such subjects, given that the investment proposals for British Rail approved by the Government give it the highest level of investment that it has had for 30 years. Such was the dereliction of duty by the last Labour Government that we have had to spend some considerable effort on reversing that neglect. That is why British Rail now has its highest capital programme for investment since the begining of the 1960s.

Dr. Hampson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend ask the chairman of British Rail to institute an inquiry into why, when the Government have allowed huge investment to improve the services from the north, the money has been invested in equipment which repeatedly fails? Will he also find out why, after hundreds of millions of pounds of investment in electrification, the line from Leeds to the south came to a total halt yesterday?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to this. His question refers to the brand new IC 225 rolling stock, which operates on the line from Leeds to London. The main problem occurred when snow was sucked into vents in the engine units causing overheating and preventing the trains from being used. It is a matter of considerable concern that brand new rolling stock, only recently introduced, should be incapable of dealing with the weather conditions of the past few days.

Mr. Prescott: Does the Secretary of State recognise that ranting on about investment levels and avoidance of responsibility on behalf of the Government led to the dismissal of the past two Secretaries of State? When British Rail brings forward its plans for an alternative route in March, is he prepared to consider them and make a recommendation on behalf of the Government, or will he simply ignore that responsibility and leave the decision to British Rail?

Mr. Rifkind: I notice the hon. Gentleman's sensitivity when reminded of the last Labour Government's dereliction of duty in relation to rail investment. We shall consider proposals for new rail investment on their merits. I expect to hear from British Rail, although I doubt whether that will be as early as March. When we get its proposals on the high-speed link, we shall consider them on their merits and respond in due course.

Network SouthEast

5. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current policy towards financial support for Network SouthEast.

Mr. Freeman: Our policy is that Network SouthEast should reduce its reliance on subsidy, which is equivalent to about 10 per cent. of operating costs, in order to release more funds for investment in a higher quality service.

Sir Anthony Durant: When my hon. Friend next meets the chairman of British Rail, will he discuss subsidy with him again, with a view to slowing down the rate of cut in that subsidy, bearing in mind the fall in passenger traffic and the terrible effects of the weather, about which we have already heard? I am particularly concerned about the Oxford line.

Mr. Freeman: Breaking even in 1992-93 is a target, not an obligation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will be reviewing, with British Rail, the achievability of that target in due course. We have already realised the need for higher safety expenditure and the downturn in revenue in the off peak and have increased the public service obligation by £100 million this year. We shall continue to be realistic and pragmatic.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister explain why this arbitrary target has been introduced? Has not the time come to withdraw this ridiculous target and instead to give

greater public support to the railway industry, particularly to investment in Network SouthEast, because lack of investment is leading to a reduction in maintenance costs, which has the knock-on effect of reducing the safety margins under which the railways operate? Does the Minister accept that he is responsible for the investment problems of the railways and therefore for the lack of maintenance that goes with it?

Mr. Freeman: No, I do not accept that. First of all, it was not an arbitrary target when it was set in December 1989 by the previous Secretary of State. It reflected a gradual 10-year progress towards recovery of a higher proportion of operating expenses from the commuting passenger. The passenger now pays 90 per cent. of the operating costs on Network SouthEast, so I should have thought that moving to paying 100 per cent. would not involve an issue of principle. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will carefully consider any problems in achieving that which British Rail puts to him. Investment is at a record level. Network SouthEast will have £1·3 billion in the next three years, including the delivery of 700 new coaches. That is a creditable performance.

Mr. Adley: Is my hon. Friend aware that while some may consider his change of emphasis from target to obligation to be a retreat, for me it is an advance towards my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's recently announced intention of improving public services? Will my hon. Friend confirm that he does not regard subsidy as an alternative to investment? Is he aware that West Germany spends three times as much annually on investment than is spent here and six times as much on subsidy? Is he prepared to say, albeit quietly so that not many of us can hear, that the reduction in the public service obligation grant concomitant with the decline in services must be related?

Mr. Freeman: If my hon. Friend, with his long experience of railways, goes back 10 years he will recall that at the beginning of the 1980s the PSO grant was twice the present level—it was then over £1 billion and it is now £600 million—and investment was half the current level. There is a relationship, when we consider the public purse, between that which can be afforded by way of revenue subsidy and that which can be afforded by way of investment. The Government accept that for the foreseeable future regional railways will have to be subsidised. They knit together the fabric of rural Britain. I have already commented in great detail on Network SouthEast in response to an earlier question.

London Underground (Escalators)

7. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the achievements of London Underground Ltd. against its performance objectives for escalator availability.

Mr. Freeman: Following the King's Cross fire, London Underground began a major programme of escalator renewal and improvement. It was asked to increase escalator availability from 78 to 86 per cent. by March 1992. In the last quarter of 1990, it achieved an overall availability of 85 per cent. Immediately following the King's Cross fire, the figure was 67 per cent.

Mr. Greenway: I am glad to hear of the improved availability of escalators, but also rather surprised. When my constituents and I use the London underground system we often find the escalators out of use. At Greenford station in my constituency the escalator has been out of use on three occasions in the past 18 months to two years, including six months during 1990. As that means elderly constituents of mine having to use the longest staircase on the London underground, will my hon. Friend ensure that the escalator at Greenford station is permanently available from now on?

Mr. Freeman: I am happy to go with my hon. Friend, at his convenience, to Greenford station. He would have found the escalator working this morning. London Underground's investment programme is a substantial one. It includes, for example, complete refurbishment and modernisation of the Angel station at a cost of £70 million, and the introduction of a new service on the Central line at a cost of £700 million. That is evidence of London Underground's massive investment programme, which includes the modernisation or replacement of escalators.

Mr. Cohen: Perhaps the Minister will meet Neil Gerrard, the Labour party's excellent prospective parliamentary candidate for Walthamstow, who keeps telling me that the escalators at Walthamstow Central on the Victoria line are repeatedly out of action. If the Minister will not meet Neil Gerrard, will he at least see the chairman of London Underground to ensure that the escalators at Walthamstow Central work reliably?

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the escalators went out of service on 14 January. They should be back in service in April as a major replacement of what are known as the step chains is needed.

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend will be aware of my belief that many of the problems which face London Buses, London Underground and British Rail are essentially management problems, due to the failure of management to manage their operations directly. What plans has he to restructure and streamline the management of these essential services?

Mr. Freeman: The management structure of London Underground Ltd. is moving in the direction that my hon. Friend wants, because it now has managers of individual lines and of groups of stations. As for British Rail, London Underground Ltd. and London Buses Ltd., I agree that their management must be reformed, reorganised and strengthened, so that it can get the most out of the generous increases in resources.

Ms. Ruddock: The Minister tries to reassure the House about London Underground, but is he unaware that it plans to cut 980 jobs? Astonishingly, 66 of those posts are for engineers who work on lifts and escalators. Will the Minister acknowledge London Underground's financial crisis, which is leading to cuts in services on six tube lines, the destaffing of stations and the postponement of the Northern line's much-needed refurbishment? Is not it time that the Minister gave more grant aid to prevent a total collapse of London underground services?

Mr. Freeman: I do not recognise that there is a total collapse of services, but I agree with the hon. Lady that London Underground has serious problems. The hon. Lady will find that many of the staff losses relate to the introduction of automatic ticket processing, which brings

a saving in booking office staff. The Northern line replacement has not been cut. It remains in the programme for the mid-1990s, after the Central line's £700 million programme has been completed. I challenge the hon. Lady on the question of mileage, because there have been no discernible mileage cuts in London underground services.

London Airports

8. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the advice from the Civil Aviation Authority on traffic distribution rules at London's airports.

Mr. Rifkind: I have received a number of representations about different aspects of the authority's advice.

Mr. Haselhurst: Has it been put to my right hon. and learned Friend that to abandon most of the traffic distribution rules, as the Civil Aviation Authority recommends, would place much greater pressure on scarce slots at Heathrow? That inevitably raises questions of capacity at the airport. Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that Miami international airport, whose runway configuration is similar to that of Heathrow, manages 120 movements an hour, compared with about 80 at Heathrow?

Mr. Rifkind: The number of slots available relates to the capacity of the runway and terminal facilities. The traffic distribution rules relate to whether the Government should continue to insist, irrespective of capacity, that only certain airlines should be allowed to use Heathrow airport. The two issues are not connected, in the sense that a decision on the latter will have no consequences, so far as the Government are concerned, for the other issues that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the CAA has made it perfectly clear that if the traffic rules are changed as it suggests, there is a great possibility that domestic flights to and from Heathrow—such as those serving Aberdeen, Glasgow, Inverness and Newcastle—will be frozen out either to Gatwick or Stansted? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that, in addition to my representations, Lord King, the chairman of British Airways—a great supporter of the Government and of their competition policy—has strongly expressed his opinion that the rules should not be changed? Will the Secretary of State accept that combined weight of opinion and scrap the CAA's advice?

Mr. Rifkind: The idea of the hon. Gentleman and Lord King forming an alliance in respect of any matter is a novel introduction to our debates and something to which I must give all due consideration.

The CAA's only specific recommendation in respect of domestic services is that new domestic services should be permitted to use Heathrow. They are forbidden from doing so at present. I am aware of the suggestion that removing the traffic distribution rules could lead indirectly to existing domestic services being compelled to leave Heathrow. Of course, they could not be deprived of their entitlement to use the airport, but the suggestion is that BAA might increase landing charges to force out those airlines.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that the CAA has the power to prevent discriminatory action against individual airlines or classes of airlines by BAA in respect of landing charges. If we accepted the CAA's recommendation on traffic distribution rules, I should consider it most improper if higher landing charges were used to try to force out an individual airline that would otherwise be entitled to use Heathrow.

Mr. Robert Hicks: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the possible adverse affects—either directly or indirectly—on regional airlines such as Brymon Airways, which services the south-west? Does he agree that if those airlines were squeezed out, for whatever reason, it would have serious consequences for regional economies, especially in trying to attract inward investment? More than 80 per cent. of Brymon's passengers using the Plymouth to Heathrow run go on to or come from foreign destinations.

Mr. Rifkind: I note what my hon. Friend says and I am, of course, sensitive to the interests of regional airlines and conscious of the importance that some of them attach to using Heathrow with a view to attracting investment to various parts of the kingdom. I emphasise that nothing in the Civil Aviation Authority's recommendations would remove the current entitlement of any regional airline to use Heathrow. The concern is with regard to any future BAA landing charge policy. It is important that its right to determine landing charges should be based on proper and legitimate considerations and that such a right should not, either now or in the future, be used for ulterior purposes.

Mr. David Marshall: When does the Secretary of State expect to announce his decision on the Civil Aviation Authority's advice? Will it be before or after he concludes his negotiations with the Americans on bilateral agreements?

Mr. Rifkind: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I cannot give him a specific date. As the exchanges today have demonstrated, hon. Gentlemen and other interests have put a number of inter-related issues before the Government to which we should like to give more consideration before responding to the Civil Aviation Authority. On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the Bermuda 2 negotiations with the United States have not yet reached a conclusion. However, I was interested to read in *The New York Times* a few weeks ago an article which said:

"US passengers would be wise to forgo rooting for the America negotiators and instead root for the British."

That seemed to be very sensible advice from *The New York Times*.

Mr. Mans: When taking account of the advice given in the traffic distribution report, will my right hon. and learned Friend also take into account European airlines' access to the London terminal manoeuvring area and especially the subsidies proposed by the European Commission for nationalised airlines on the continent which are both uncompetitive and unfair to airlines such as British Airways and British Midland?

Mr. Rifkind: I assure my hon. Friend that the European Commission is not proposing any such subsidy. In response to suggestions from some other European countries that they might wish to introduce subsidies in the current climate, Sir Leon Brittan, the Commissioner, said that the Commission would consider requests for approvals such subsidies against the criteria of the impact

that they might have on the competitive position of airlines in countries, such as the United Kingdom, which do not intend to provide them for their civil airlines.

Ms. Walley: It is all very well and good for the Secretary of State to say that he is sensitive about regional airports. How will he safeguard their interests and how will he ensure that the local economy is taken care of? Are not shareholders concerned about maximising revenue rather than maximising services?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not want to pre-empt the consideration that I am giving to the Civil Aviation Authority's recommendations. The only way in which regional airlines' interests could be affected by the CAA's recommendations would be by what could be described as improper use by the BAA of its power over landing charges. Therefore, that matter needs to be given further thought.

Scottish Freight

9. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investment he is proposing for freight activity in Scotland between 1991 and 1994.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's planned investment in freight over the next three years includes a freight terminal in central Scotland and new services between Scotland and the continent through the channel tunnel.

Mr. Clarke: Is the Minister aware of the excellent record of the work force of the Coatbridge container base and Freightliner depot? Will he match their commitment by ensuring adequate investment so that they will have jobs in the future? When British Rail takes a decision about the Freightliner village which will arise from the channel tunnel, does he accept that it would be outrageous if it considered a location in Glasgow in view of the problems of the Kingston bridge? Given the infrastructure that already exists at Coatbridge and Gartcosh as well as Mossend and the huge job losses in Lanarkshire—many of which were due to the Secretary of State—can we return to the prosperity that we once had under a Labour Government and ensure that that development takes place in Lanarkshire?

Mr. Freeman: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman supports the concept of a new freight terminal in central Scotland and I shall certainly draw his comments to the attention of ScotRail and the chairman of British Rail. It is true that any new freight terminal on which British Rail decides—it is currently considering three possible locations in central Scotland—will involve private-sector investment, which I hope will reach a significant level. It will also involve the creation of extra jobs and the haulage of freight on an intermodal basis, which means collecting freight by road and then shipping it by train for long distances. The routes will include the channel tunnel. I believe that that will bring more jobs and extra prosperity to central Scotland.

Humber Bridge

10. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest figure he has as to the level of debt being carried by the Humber Bridge Board.

Mr. Chope: It is estimated that at 31 March this year the debt of the Humber Bridge Board will amount to approximately £410 million.

Mr. Cran: The Government have already accepted that the Humber bridge is a special case for the purposes of partial debt write-off. When will the negotiations with the Treasury be completed and when does the Minister expect to make an announcement about the write-off? I am sure that he agrees that the matter is causing enormous uncertainty and has dragged on for far too long.

Mr. Chope: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the delay. I assure him that everything possible is being done to ensure that a decision can be made as quickly as possible.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Magistrates

28. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many magistrates he has appointed since he became Chancellor.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Chris Patten): I have appointed 50 magistrates since my appointment as Chancellor of the Duchy.

Mr. Wilshire: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the amount of time that they and all other magistrates have to spend dealing with councillors who have refused to pay their community charge, while still claiming their allowances? Will he confirm that that applies to more than 1,000 councillors and does he agree that such action shows the true face of Labour politics today?

Mr. Patten: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is estimated that 1,000 Labour councillors are not paying their community charge, although their concern about financial matters does not seem to extend to not claiming their council allowances. They all seem to be pretty good candidates for the supper club.

Ribble Valley

30. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he proposes to make an official visit to Ribble Valley when he next visits the county of Lancashire.

Mr. Chris Patten: My plans to visit the Ribble Valley are at present under review.

Mr. Pike: I am sure that they are. The Chancellor may find himself there in the not too distant future and I assure him that he will encounter widespread concern throughout the constituency about the present level of interest rates. That concern is felt by mortgage payers, industrialists and farmers, all of whom are being squeezed unbearably as a result of current Government policy. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure them that something will be done to bring down interest rates as early as possible?

Mr. Patten: Should I be required in the Ribble Valley in the reasonably near future, what I will find is, first, an excellent Conservative candidate; secondly, widespread concern about the spending of Lancashire county council;

and thirdly, I am sure, a widespread understanding of the importance of getting on top of inflation, however difficult that may be in the short term.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend realise that I recently visited Ribble Valley and found the position to be just as he described it? The people there are looking forward to my right hon. Friend's visit and he will be cheered through the valleys.

Mr. Patten: I am always delighted to follow in my hon. Friend's footsteps, larger than mine though they may be.

Dr. Cunningham: Is not it typical of the Conservative party that the Tory candidate for Ribble Valley came third in the Pontypridd by-election, although he is Welsh?

When the Chancellor visits the north-west, what will he have to say to the 19,000 people who have lost their jobs in the past six months in that region as a result of the failures and mismanagement of the economy for which the present Government are responsible? In particular, what will he have to say to the 3,000 workers at British Aerospace in Preston who face redundancy and a bleak future because of the Government's industrial and economic failures?

Mr. Patten: I seem to recall that our candidate for Ribble Valley did rather better than the Opposition's candidate at his last outing with the electorate in the Neath by-election. I am sure that the work force and management at British Aerospace know that they have a much better future under a Conservative Government than they ever would have under a Labour Government, given, not least, the Labour party's plans for defence spending. I shall also be able to point to the large number of jobs and small businesses created in the north-west under this Government during the last few years, difficult though present circumstances may be.

Mr. Hind: When my right hon. Friend visits Ribble Valley, will he draw it to the attention of the people that their local education authority, Labour-run Lancashire county council, is holding back £150 million of revenue money from schools, many of which are locally managed, to the detriment of the education service? Will he also tell the people of Ribble Valley that it is time that Lancashire county council dismantled its central authority so that schools can be improved and the money put where it is needed—in the classroom?

Mr. Patten: I much sympathise with my hon. Friend's remarks. As I recall it, Lancashire county council's spending has increased by over 20 per cent. this year. Heaven alone knows where all that money is going.

Official Duties

31. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much time he has spent on official duties since his appointment.

Mr. Chris Patten: Up to a quarter of my time is spent carrying out my duties as Chancellor of the Duchy.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Chancellor agree that the official duties get in the way of his other duties as chairman of the Tory party? Is it true that he has told the civil servants for that tiny little job he has got that in this election year they must clear the decks for April, May and June? Is it also correct that he has told them to leave things open for a possible date in October and that his official duties will be in inverse proportion to the way in which the Tory Government are able to fiddle interest rates and the other economic indicators?

Mr. Patten: I should like to be the first and perhaps the only Member to wish the hon. Gentleman a happy birthday—although not, I hope he will understand, many happy returns.

I am a very modest fellow, but I hope that, as Chancellor of the Duchy, I make some small contribution to the continuing success of the Government and that I shall continue to do so for many months and years ahead. As for the general election, there are more than 70 Thursdays between now and the time at which we shall have to go to the country. Whichever of those Thursdays is chosen for the next general election, I am sure that we shall win it.

Mr. Mans: During his official duties, will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to meet the Labour leader of Lancashire county council and ask her why she leaked to the press, before it was published in full detail, a report about Blackpool's beaches which has caused great worry to the tourist trade and to the economy of Blackpool generally?

Mr. Patten: A meeting with the Labour leader of Lancashire county council is not my first ambition in life, but were I to meet her I should draw her attention to the £3 billion which will be invested over the next few years under this Government in cleaning up our beaches and bathing waters. The only threat to that continuing programme would be the election of a Labour Government dedicated to the renationalisation of the water industry.

Office Costs

32. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the annual cost of his office.

Mr. Chris Patten: In the financial year 1990-91, my office has a budget of £78,388·00.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Chancellor draw to the attention of his officials the answer that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—that he spends about a quarter of his time on his official duties and that the rest of it is a sinecure on behalf of the Tory party? In that respect, I should have thought that he would be repaying a considerable amount of money to the civil service, such as three quarters of his travel expenses, and office costs which are spent solely on Conservative party duties. Can we be assured that his appointment as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is not a backhanded way of subsidising the Tory party? His job has nothing to do with the duchy, but is solely to administer the Tory party.

Mr. Patten: Ours is a humble little enterprise and it is very cost effective. It is certainly no sinecure, any more than it was when Labour Ministers discharged such responsibilities in the past.

Official Visits

33. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many official visits he has made as Chancellor of the Duchy.

Mr. Chris Patten: Four, Sir.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, notwithstanding the official visits that he has already made to the duchy, in the coming weeks he will visit that part of the duchy in the Ribble Valley? When he visits Ribble Valley, will he explain fairly and squarely to the tenants whom he meets the cost of a future Labour Government and the fact that no one in this country could ever afford that cost?

Mr. Patten: I shall certainly attempt to discharge that undertaking if I am able to visit Ribble Valley in the next few weeks—it may be possible. I am sure that all hon. Members, including Labour Front-Bench Members, will want to try to explain to the electorate in the next few months and years precisely how the promises that were made by the shadow Chancellor—for example, that the Labour party will not increase spending or taxes—equate with everything that is said by every other shadow spokesman.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliament Square Traffic

38. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what assessment he has made of the effect of schemes to speed traffic past the House to and from Parliament square on the case for consequent measures to offer hon. Members an opportunity of safely crossing the road on the way from outlying offices to the House.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The effectiveness of the traffic control measures recently installed in and around Parliament square is still being assessed. Preliminary conclusions indicate, however, significant improvements in the flow of traffic and the safe control of pedestrians. I am advised that the existing crossings are considered to provide the best arrangements for Members crossing to the House from outlying buildings.

Mr. Michael: I suggest to the Leader of the House that the latter part of his brief was written by somebody who has not had to run the gamut of the speeded-up traffic. I assure him that the likelihood of by-elections, mainly for the Conservative Benches, is increased by those traffic measures, because the improvement in traffic is generally for the benefit of the general public and does not appear to be to the general benefit of hon. Members. No reference is made to the importance for all hon. Members who have to cross the road for the benefit of television appearances. It is not only those of us who have offices on the other side who have an interest in this. Will he promise to keep the matter under review and consider measures that will protect hon. Members going about their business?

Mr. MacGregor: It is no small thing that the changes have been to the benefit of the general public in terms of safety and the free flow of traffic. We must take that into account. As to the problems for hon. Members, the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee has requested the provision of traffic refuge islands. The matter is under active consideration by the traffic authorities and I understand that a report on their conclusions is expected in the near future.

GP Service

39. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he has undertaken any assessment of the demand among hon. Members for a general practitioner service to be provided in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: On the basis of professional medical advice, successive Services Committees have accepted that it would be inappropriate to establish a general practitioner service in the House. For any medical matter, apart from an emergency, for which special procedures exist, hon. Members are expected to consult their own doctors.

Mr. Butler: I note that my right hon. Friend has not consulted hon. Members on this matter, but, in assessing demand for such a service, will he remember that many hon. Members are not registered with general practitioners in London and that the peculiar hours that we work would often preclude us from attending surgery?

Mr. MacGregor: As for assessing Members' views, the Services Committee accepted advice that a general practitioner service is not appropriate for the House, but of course it is always open to Members of Parliament to make their views known to the Services Committee.

On my hon. Friend's second point, as he knows, facilities are available in the House and provisions exist to ensure that in an emergency Members are conveyed without delay to a hospital in the immediate vicinity.

Palace of Westminster (Access)

41. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what action he is taking to ensure that the Palace of Westminster becomes more accessible to the public.

Mr. MacGregor: I can only add to what I have said recently on this subject that I expect that the studies on access for the disabled to which I referred on 31 January will be considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee before Easter.

Mr. Corbyn: I am pleased that they will be studied before Easter. But why has it taken so long even to produce a report on the lack of access to this building for people with disabilities? It is a disgrace that this building, where the laws are set for the rest of the country, including laws on disabled access, does not provide access for the disabled. Will the right hon. Gentleman make it his personal priority to ensure that before the summer, when many tourists and others will visit the building, we have full disabled access to every floor of the House so that people in wheelchairs do not go through the humiliation of being brought in via the back stairs, so to speak, and taken up in the service lift to attend meetings on the upper floors? It is a disgrace and I hope that the Leader of the House will make sure that it is put right quickly.

Mr. MacGregor: A number of steps have been taken over the years to improve access for the disabled to the House. I share the view that we should do everything possible to improve on what we already have. The Parliamentary Works Officer is actively studying suggestions, some of which were made just before Christmas, to improve access to various parts of the House. I am keen that the report should be ready and should be considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee as quickly as possible. That is why I asked that the deadline be set before Easter.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in the light of the terrorist attack on Downing street last week, public access to the Palace of Westminster will not be reduced in any way? Does he agree that if that were done as a security measure we should be playing straight into the hands of the terrorists?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that it is extremely important for parliamentary democracy that access to the House continues to be available to the general public. However, he will agree that in the current circumstances it is right to take all appropriate security measues in the light of security advice. That is why several steps have been taken recently to improve security.

Dr. Cunningham: The majority of Members—indeed, I hope, the whole House—recognise the urgent need to review security. The measures taken certainly have my support and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

To revert to the original question of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), the right hon. Gentleman said that a number of steps have been taken. It is the number of steps which is the problem. If the House really intends to resolve the problem of access for disabled people, it should show the same urgency in dealing with that problem as it has shown on security.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will agree that there is nothing between us on the issue. I have been grateful for his support on security matters. Sometimes reports such as the one on the disabled take rather longer than any of us would wish. I have tried to expedite the report because I understand the concerns.

The Gulf

42. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps towards the establishment of a Select Committee to consider the ecological disaster in the Gulf.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: Should not an emergency Select Committee be set up to consider the entreaties of the Bahrainis, who are faced with the oil slick, and to consider the mangrove swamps and sea grasses which are the nurturing grounds for fin fish and shrimps? Does not the Leader of the House consider it odd that, instead of considering Qaruh, Ummal Maradin and the coral islands which are the nurseries for the larvae that are so vital to life in the Gulf, the House will spend six hours discussing the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill, a controversial measure which is not nearly so urgent as the ecological catastrophe in the Gulf?

Mr. MacGregor: I should have thought that there would be widespread support for the measure that we are to debate this afternoon. It would be entirely appropriate.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the United Kingdom Government responded quickly to requests for assistance in environmental and pollution control in the Gulf. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is taking steps to assess what more the public, private and voluntary sectors can do, when it is safe to do so. However, the matter is not an appropriate subject for a special Select Committee. If it wished, the appropriate departmental Select Committee could hold an inquiry in due course.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has pointed out on several occasions, is not the underlying problem that Saddam Hussein has been not just an ecological threat to the Gulf, but a chemical and biological threat to many of his neighbours? He has already invaded two other countries and poisoned many of his own people. We would be far better off if he could be put into balk. Then we could get on with discussing the natural heritage in Scotland without worrying about his impact on the Gulf and the world in general.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He is right to make it clear exactly where the criticism should lie.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Councillors

43. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many Opposition Members have been appointed to the Privy Council in the last 10 years; and what proportion this is of total new Privy Councillors.

Mr. MacGregor: In the past 10 years three leaders of Opposition parties—the right hon. Members for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) in 1983 and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) in 1989—have been made members of the Privy Council. This represents 3·5 per cent. of the number of hon. Members of the House so appointed during that period and 2 per cent. of the total number of new Privy Councillors.

Mr. Cohen: I expect that the Lord President will not agree that this feudal, undemocratic body of Privy Councillors should be abolished. Does not the proportion to which he referred show that it is even less democratic and less fair than the House of Lords, which is saying something? Does he agree that we will need a Labour Government if we are to redress the balance?

Mr. MacGregor: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the party composition of Privy Councillors in the House of Commons and at those appointed in recent years, he will see that over the years, not just recently, there has been, inevitably, a heavy preponderance of appointments from the party in government. The figures for the past 10 or 11 years reflect the fact that, fortunately for this country, we have had a Conservative Government. I hope that that will continue.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chamber Lighting

44. Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the current lighting in the Chamber of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: Following the agreement of both the Select Committee on Broadcasting and the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee, a prototype of the proposed permanent chandeliers is to be installed at Easter. Subject then to early approval of the design and the availability of funds, the plan is to replace the temporary chandeliers during the summer recess.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend accept that we shall all be glad to see an end to this lighting, including the heat that comes from the lights? Will he arrange for Members to be consulted on the future programme of lighting in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: When my hon. Friend sees the prototype, he will agree that it is a considerable advance on what we have now and an attractive design. We hope that it will be available for all Members of the House to look at and that it will be possible for them to comment on the design before the chandeliers are installed and decisions taken on them.

Cold Weather Payments

3.32 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the implementation of the cold weather payments.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear at Question Time last Thursday, and as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced in a written answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), the severe weather payments scheme had already come into operation last Thursday in nearly half the areas defined for the purpose, and that in order to help ensure that vulnerable groups take appropriate steps to keep warm, the seven-day qualifying period would be waived and the scheme brought into operation in every area. We have also increased the payment from £5 to £6 for any qualifying week. These changes have been put into effect.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not the case that not one single penny will go to any pensioner, however small his income may be, who is not on income support? That will cause tremendous difficulties. Perhaps the Minister saw the story about pensioners in yesterday's *Sunday Express*. Is it not also the case that, for those who are eligible and who have saved up for their funeral expenses, those savings will be taken into account in the £1,000? That is cruel and should be carefully considered by Ministers.

Is the Minister further aware that this £6 a week—I accept entirely that it is better than nothing—is a miserly sum and will in no way go substantially towards paying gas and electricity bills, about which pensioners are so worried? That is why so many pensioners do not keep their homes adequately heated, but wrap themselves up in blankets. For many of them, winter is just added misery —all winters, let alone the freezing one that we are going through now. Cannot a nation like ours find a more civilised way of helping the elderly through the winter?

Mr. Scott: Not only should we, but we have. When we moved from supplementary benefit to income support in 1988, some £417 million was included to help people on income support with their fuel bills. The House will be aware that, in the past two years, nearly £300 million extra has been found to help poorer pensioners with their living costs. This is an exceptionally cold weather scheme, and I believe that it is right to restrict it to those in greatest need —those on income support who have a child under five, a disabled person in the household or someone aged 60 or over.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his announcement has been warmly welcomed throughout the north of England? It would be more warmly welcomed by many of my constituents if they were able to get their hands on the money but, because of strikes among Department of Social Security workers, those who are entitled to benefits are not getting them because their applications are not being processed. There is not much point in giving cold weather money in June, but I am told that it is estimated that that is when the Department will get round to paying it.

Mr. Scott: I obviously regret any circumstances when industrial action or anything else affects the ability of the Department to meet the needs of those who are entitled to our help. That ability is limited when we are faced with such circumstances. I can certainly scotch any rumours that people are unable to claim their exceptionally cold weather payments because of the lack of forms in our offices—as has been alleged by one or two people.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): How long will the scheme continue? Will it apply for the rest of this winter, rather than just for this present cold snap? If the cold weather returns later, between now and the summer, will people still be covered by the scheme? The most important thing that the Government could now do in addition to the welcome changes that they have made is to make the payments automatic because there are a lot of people who do not believe that they are eligible and a lot of people who are too proud to ask for the money and to fill in the requisite form. What consideration has been given to making the payments automatic? Will the Minister now change the regulations to make them so?

Mr. Scott: Let me answer the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. No, the changes that were announced last week were in respect of the seven-day period, because of the general and excessive nature of the cold spell that the country was enduring. In response to that excessive weather, we showed a flexible and common-sense approach to the problems. As from now, the normal rules will apply, but obviously we shall carefully monitor what is happening throughout the country in terms of cold weather to see what may be necessary in the future.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the payment is better than the nothing that people got from any previous Labour Government? Will my right hon. Friend also confirm that he is co-operating fully with Help the Aged, Age Concern and other charitable organisations at this time?

Mr. Scott: I cannot quite agree with my hon. Friend that nothing at all happened under the previous Administration, but their arrangements were very discretionary and very complex for claimants to understand. I underline my hon. Friend's point that it is important to recognise that the response to the cold weather does not rest entirely with the benefits system. There are things that people can be advised to do in terms of diet, clothing and insulation that are at least as important as benefits. I welcome the co-operation among the Government, local authorities and voluntary organisations to make that response as effective as possible.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Can the Minister assure the House that, during the cold spell, no poor people froze to death? If he cannot, does not that suggest that there is something wrong with the number of people who qualify for the scheme and the amount of money that the Government pay out?

Mr. Scott: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a serious interest in this. I can see no reason at all why someone who takes up his entitlement to benefit, who listens to the advice of the voluntary organisations, who

[Mr. Scott]

uses the "keep well, keep warm" health line and who also has the benefit of good neighbours—at a time of such weather it is very important——

Mr. Field: Can you give an assurance that no poor people froze to death?

Mr. Scott: Of course I cannot give the assurance that no one, perhaps by neglect or by accident, will lose his life. In any case, we all know that during winter mortalities increase. The number suffering in that way, however, has steadily decreased under both Governments in recent years, and I look forward to it decreasing still further. That is the experience throughout the northern hemisphere, and we want to see the rate diminish still further.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I warmly welcome what my right hon. Friend said about these payments. May I ask him, however, to look again at the areas for which payments are triggered by individual weather stations? Does he accept that anomalies and a great deal of resentment can be aroused simply by the side of the line on which one lives? Does he not agree that it would be better to trigger cold weather payments on a countrywide basis and at the first opportunity?

Mr. Scott: I do not agree with my hon. Friend's proposition. He may know that regulations introduced recently make the localities covered more sensitive to the weather stations that trigger cold weather payments. Certainly, in Scotland, a number of changes were made in that direction. The Meteorological Office co-operated with us in an exercise across the entire country to ensure the greatest possible sensitivity.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): The Minister must understand that the system is not working. For instance, people in my area have to look across the River Tay and well into Fife—to Leuchars—for their trigger point. Does not the Minister agree that it would make more sense to use local authority areas to determine the trigger points for these payments?

Mr. Scott: No, because the meteorological offices across across the country have a simple, regular and computerised means of ascertaining temperatures. *[Interruption.]* Of course I am prepared to consider representations concerning stations that trigger in hon. Members' localities. Indeed, we have already responded to many of those concerns.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite all the efforts that are being made to publicise this scheme, far too many old people are still unaware of their entitlement to benefit? Will he tell the House what he is doing, with the aid of organisations like Help the Aged, to draw to the attention of elderly people their rights under this scheme, which is so widely welcomed?

Mr. Scott: As my hon. Friend knows, Help the Aged is operating a freephone system under the "keep well, keep warm" campaign. I was delighted over the weekend to notice that telephone number being flashed up on the television screen during broadcasts. In addition, it is being announced regularly by local radio stations, and advertisements are appearing in the local press. I welcome all that, because I want to ensure that everyone who needs this help gets it.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): But does not the Minister realise that comments from himself, from the Prime Minister and from the Secretary of State for Social Security over the last few days clearly show that the Government recognise that the current scheme is totally ineffective—that it is not working for the benefit of the poor, the elderly and the needy in our society? Will he, having made that concession, give a commitment to review the whole situation and the operation of the system to ensure that those people who are desperately in need of heating during the winter months will receive payments automatically and continuously? Does he accept that, particularly in Scotland, some irritation is experienced by those of us who, having for two decades pushed for a cold weather allowance, now suddenly discover that ministerial chilblains seem to be more effective than our rational arguments?

Mr. Scott: I believe that the Government were right last week to respond flexibly to what I have called the excessive and general nature of the cold weather that affected the country as a whole. I can certainly give the hon. Lady an undertaking that when this winter is over we shall review the system and its operation. However, I should be surprised if the course adopted were to turn out as she has suggested.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): So that we may find out for ourselves how effective the Government's scheme for letting people know of this excellent arrangement has been, will my right hon. Friend, as part of his review, publish the take-up percentage that the Department feels is appropriate? Only if such a figure is made available shall we be able to find out whether the complaints that we hear are justified. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need facts, not just opinions?

Mr. Scott: I shall certainly have a look to see what further information might be given about the workings of the present publicity campaign.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Those of us from other parts of the country are sometimes relieved when there is cold weather in London, because it seems to be the only time when the Government recognise that there are problems for elderly people. Will the Government ensure that they conduct a thorough review of the scheme and other means of supporting elderly and vulnerable people during the cold weather? The Minister has not attempted to address the fact that, in this country, we lose more people during cold weather spells than any other comparable country in the northern hemisphere. Why does that happen? Will he commit the Government to resourcing research, so that we can find out why it happens and take appropriate action to stop it?

Mr. Scott: I have already said that, when we come to the end of this spell of cold weather and, more importantly, this winter, we shall review the workings of the scheme and the pattern of support generally. The House is concentrating too narrowly on the exceptionally cold-weather scheme and forgetting other help given to people.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. Friend note the welcome in my constituency for the Prime Minister's early announcement of the provision of the payments last Thursday, which went down very well, as people did not have to worry over the weekend? Will he stress that it is not just a matter of payments, but that there is a problem of how old people are looked after by others in their community during the cold weather? Will he encourage organisations and neighbours to work with old people even more? Will he note that, under the latest arrangements, electricity companies are less likely to cut people off, and there are new arrangements for phasing payment of bills over a much longer period?

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the government's response. It is certainly true that fuel companies have said that people should not be fearful of spending money to keep themselves warm at present and will be prepared to make arrangements for staged payments later for any large bills produced. I am delighted to endorse my hon. Friend's point that it is important for voluntary organisations to play a major part in the exercise.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Although the Minister is right to stress the need for proper food and clothing, surely he is aware that the real test is people's ability to keep the heat on in their homes as long as they want, without worrying about the cost. Will he look again at the point about cash limits made by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)? Many people—I met pensioners in my constituency this morning—having read the small print, believe that the announcement was a con? When they saw the record of what the Prime Minister said here last Thursday, they thought, "Thank goodness, something will be done for us." However, many people with a small amount of money—£1,000, which we all know is not a great deal—will not use it because they are scared to do so. Sadly, the scheme will in no way help such people who are in urgent need.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman knows the respect I have for him, but that response was uncharacteristically excessive. I believe that the capital rules provide a sensible way of ensuring that those people who get help are those who most need it—those who do not have spare resources to deploy to meet extra fuel costs.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many Conservative Members are sick of the Opposition's carping, and greatly respect the speed with which the Department acted to relieve the misery of many old people who would have suffered a great deal as a consequence of the cold? Many of those people will find it reassuring to know that they can turn up the heat, secure in the knowledge that they will be warm. How many people actually qualify for the scheme announced last week?

Mr. Scott: It is very difficult to put any precise figure to the number who qualify. I can give the exact categories of people who will qualify—those people who are on income support, who satisfy the capital limits for the payments, have a child under five, a disabled person or somebody aged more than 60 in their household.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Minister recall that, when this absurd and wasteful scheme was last put to the test, the cost of advertising alone was the equivalent of 83,000 severe weather payments? Is he aware that, with the exception of the amount of saving, all the information is available for the Department to have a fully automatic scheme? By raising the savings limit, the Government could introduce a scheme which was assured, under which payments were guaranteed, and which would cost only slightly more. That would greatly decrease the disgraceful number of winter deaths.

Mr. Scott: I have explained why I believe that the capital limits are a sensible part of the scheme. With regard to the criticism for making it more widely known and for increasing awareness, I have been pressed from many parts of the House to increase that rather than diminish it, as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will my right hon. Friend accept that such swift action does great credit to his Department and to the Government? Does he agree that this help should be seen in its true context—yet more help to poorer pensioners, on top of the £300 million that has been given in the past two years?

Mr. Scott: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I mentioned earlier the extra help that is being given to poorer pensioners and the incorporation of help with fuel costs which we announced when we introduced income support. It is an exceptional scheme, and this winter it has responded flexibly and helpfully to the needs of people who need that help.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that this is nothing more than a seven-day wonder? Did he see an old lady aged 76 being interviewed on television the other day? She got £53 a week, and was £2 above the level that enabled her to qualify. Is not the truth of the matter that the Minister dare not give the figures for pensioners who qualify, because well over 90 per cent. of all old-age pensioners will not qualify under the scheme? This is another Tory confidence trick.

Mr. Scott: I will not weary the House by repeating the vulnerable categories who will receive this important extra help, on top of the help that has already been given to pensioners.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Having been panicked last week into lifting the seven consecutive days requirement, is the Minister really not going to lift it again this week, when the temperature is just as low or even lower? Is it not scandalous and paltry that this concession is not being continued as long as the freezing cold lasts? Is he not ashamed that this minor concession still excludes the most vulnerable group—homeless people and those sleeping rough in the snow, many of whom are without accommodation because the Secretary of State removed from them the benefit to pay for it?

Since, as many of my hon. Friends have said, millions of the poorest pensioners, families with children and disabled people are still excluded from the scheme, which is riddled with holes, and since the Secretary of State has done nothing since the last bitter cold snap four years ago to produce a long-term solution, will he not now introduce heating and insulation payments automatically for all pensioners and others on income support who are at risk throughout the cold winter months?

Mr. Scott: I have been facing the hon. Gentleman across the Floor of the House for too long to expect him to show any recognition of any good that the Government do. His own record was pathetic when he held responsibility for these matters. We were right to concentrate on helping the most vulnerable people during this excessively cold weather. I have undertaken to keep the situation under review. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment answered a private notice question last Friday, in which he outlined the help that the Department of the Environment are giving homeless or roofless people. That must be considered with the announcement that we have made.

Points of Order

3.53 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House said on television yesterday that the reason why there had been problems in European Standing Committee A was that some Members of Parliament held views on Europe that are contrary to his. That was the second time that that allegation had been made, and hon. Members who volunteered to serve on that Committee deeply resent the suggestion that, because the Government brought before it documents that they had already accepted and voted on, members of the Committee were wrong to challenge what they said. I hope that he will apologise.

Mr. Speaker: Sadly, I was not chairing that television performance, so I do not know what went on. However, I am sure that what the hon. Lady has said will be passed on to the Leader of the House.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a different point of order?

Mr. Hughes: Yes, Mr. Speaker. There has been a recent revelation about what can only be described as a sinister dining club which is inhabited by some hon. Members——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not belong to any sinister dining clubs.

Mr. Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have a dinner tonight, but I am certainly not responsible for any sinister dining club.

Mr. Hughes: I am delighted to hear, Mr. Speaker, that you are not a member of any sinister dining club. That is extremely reassuring, because I think that this is a matter for you. This sinister dining club seems to have some influence on Labour party policy. If that is not the case, I wonder whether you could refer this matter to the Committee on the Register of Members' Interests.

Mr. Speaker: It is quite clear that that is way beyond my responsibility, as was the point of order by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody).

Mr. Hughes: Further to that point of order.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order that I can deal with.

Mr. Hughes: As you have the protection of Back-Benchers very much in mind, Mr. Speaker, can you do something to stop the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) bringing the family name into disrepute?

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order Mr. Speaker. In the light of what we have heard today, could you give us some guidance about planted questions at Prime Minister's Question Time, and prime ministerial responses? What we have heard today shows that there was a planted question last Thursday and an utterly misleading——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot accept that. I have heard the term, but I do not know anything about it.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We must get on with the Bill.

Mr. Hind: The question that was asked was asked by the Father of the House and, if I remember correctly, it was a supplementary. It did not appear on the Order Paper. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has uttered a calumny against the Father of the House, and he should withdraw his allegation.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No, it is nothing to do with me.

Orders of the Day

Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill [Lords]

Order for Second Reading read.

3.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has three quite distinct parts. First and foremost, it provides for the establishment of Scottish Natural Heritage by merging the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland. The Bill also contains provisions to enable river purification authorities to control the abstraction of water within their areas for irrigation purposes, and provisions to enable the Secretary of State to make drought orders on application by water authortities and water development boards. Both these parts of the Bill replace existing legislation.

The Government's one overriding purpose in the Bill is to provide a framework within which Scotland's natural heritage can be managed in a sustainable way to secure its inheritance by future generations. Our proposals for the establishment of Scottish Natural Heritage were first announced by the then Secretary of State in the House in July 1989. Since then, we have consulted widely by publishing two consultation papers, and copies are lodged in the Library.

Our second consultation paper "Scotland's Natural Heritage: The Way Ahead" set out our aims and aspirations for the future managment of our natural heritage in Scotland and the role that we expect Scottish Natural Hedritage to play. The majority of those responding to this consultation paper supported our proposals to merge the newly created nature Conservancy Council for Scotland with the existing Countryside Commission for Scotland. This support was confirmed by an independent poll undertaken last autumn, which shows a 3:1 majority in favour of our reorganisation proposals.

Our proposals are founded on the value of the work carried out by the two predecessor organisations. As hon. Members will see from the Bill, all the functions and responsibilities of the predecessor bodies will be continued by Scottish Natural Heritage. I should like to pay a tribute to the work of the two organisations. The dedicated efforts of Nature Conservancy Council officials have resulted in the conservation of a wide range of habitats and the protection of a great diversity of species, as well as the protection of features of geological and physiographical interest.

Let me also pay no less a tribute to the work of the Countryside Commission over its two decades of existence. There is a great deal of evidence in the Scottish countryside of the Commission's efforts. I single out the work that it has done in improving the environment around our towns and cities, its initiatives in major projects in the central belt of Scotland and, more recently, its reflection on, and prescriptions for, the longer-term management of our mountain areas. We fully intend to build on all this work in the new partnership of interests that Scottish Natural Heritage represents.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): During the passage of the Bill through the House of Lords, an amendment was

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

agreed to. The House of Lords is entitled to make amendments, but does the Secretary of State think that certain Peers were entitled to say the downright nasty things that they did about the very people to whom the Secretary of State is paying tribute? He cannot be responsible for what was said, but he can be responsible for what the Minister does and does not say in the other place. Why did not the Minister there come to the defence of those officials and scientists who could not speak out for themselves?

Mr. Lang: When an organisation such as the Nature Conservancy Council is carrying out its work, such as designating sites of special scientific interest, feelings are inevitably raised about particular incidents, on particular occasions and at particular locations. It is a difficult job, and it is understandable that some people may have been upset by some of the things that the NCC has done.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: I shall just finish my response to the hon. Gentleman's earlier intervention; then I shall happily give way.

What my noble Friend said fully stated the Government's position and made clear our anxieties about, and ambitions for, the Bill. We are not seeking to replace the two existing bodies, because they have failed to do their job properly, but rather to merge them in a new body in which the two component parts will form one new integrated body that will carry the work forward in a more comprehensive and sensitive way.

Mr. Dalyell: I am dealing with a narrow point of personal behaviour. Is the Secretary of State, with the authority of a Cabinet Minister, prepared to refute some of the more wounding things that were said about staff who work for the Government but who cannot defend themselves? Is it not up to him to say, as the Minister in the House of Lords did not, that the Government do not think that these criticism were justified? We are asking for clarification of the Secretary of State's position in all this in relation to Government employees who, in the opinion of many of us, work extremely hard.

Mr. Lang: I see no need to refute anything that my noble Friend said in the other place. However, I shall repeat what I have already said and pay tribute to the work of the staff of both bodies, who will form the staff of the new Scottish Natural Heritage.

The combination of those bodies will bring about an integrated approach to the management of our natural heritage and a more efficient and effective organisational structure to achieve this. The protection of species and habitats on the one hand and the protection of landscape on the other have many characteristics in common. Perhaps not surprisingly, in Scotland, those areas of greatest nature conservation significance are usually those with landscapes of the highest aesthetic and amenity value. Rather than a clash between nature and landscape conservation, there is a strong concurrence of interest on the ground.

I should not want to give the House the impression that the new body is concerned only with conservation. Far from it—we also want it to improve appreciation of the natural heritage by residents and visitors alike. It will, for example, develop opportunities for greater understanding. It will seek to negotiate improved access and therefore increased enjoyment of our natural heritage. Some have argued that recreational access and enjoyment of the countryside are not compatible with conservation. For example, the Scottish Sports Council has suggested that it should take over the recreational access and enjoyment functions of the Countryside Commission for Scotland.

Such fragmentation would, however, undermine the objective of an integrated approach to the management of our natural heritage. We intend, however, at least for the present, to give SNH no additional responsibilities. It will have a formidable task without widening our scope to include all environmental protection functions. An aspect of our reorganisation proposals by which we set great store is the development of positive partnerships between SNH and other interests, local communities, local authorities, owners and occupiers of land, business, industry and voluntary bodies. Magnus Magnusson, the chairman-designate, has already built many bridges. I know that he will continue with his vital role with vigour, commitment and success.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State has said that it would be his wish that the new organisation has close liaison with local bodies, organisations and communities. How does he envisage that powers will be given to it to protect communities which do not wish to see nuclear dumping on their doorstep?

Mr. Lang: Scottish Natural Heritage will not be involved in planning matters. Those are essentially matters for the Secretary of State. Nor will it be responsible directly for structure plans, which I suspect is one of the elements behind the hon. Lady's question. It might, however, expect to be consulted by local authorities in drawing up their structure plans.

We are intent on partnerships being developed by having a highly dispersed organisations for SNH. To bring that to fruition, we intend that SNH will build on the regional and area office network of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. I fully expect that the great majority of staff in SNH will be based in regional and local offices.

There are a number of other ingredients that are required for the success of the operation at ground level. Undoubtedly, one of them is the support of practical research and development to increase our understanding of sustainable management and to help in the provision of practical demonstration schemes and initiatives. That is why there will be a centrally managed cadre of specialists.

Additionally, no organisation with powers of delegation of responsibility and dispersal of staff can operate successfully without a coherent set of policies and decision-making frameworks. This is properly the role of the main board, which will be advised by staff in the agency's headquarters.

The agency will have another vital role, and that is to advise the Government or any other party on any aspect of policy or activity which it considers has an effect on Scotland's natural heritage. We expect this task to be carried out with objectivity, rigour and integrity, but most of all, effectively. I assure the House that I shall look to SNH as my adviser on the conservation, understanding and enjoyment of Scotland's natural heritage, and on the means of bringing this to fruition in a sustainable manner.

There were those who at the outset criticised our proposals as unduly parochial. I hope that the House will set aside any doubts on that front from what has been said since we announced our proposals. Scottish Natural Heritage cannot operate without proper regard to national and international considerations. After all, it will be the responsible body for the identification, notification and protection of sites of special scientific interest, including those sites which might in addition be designated under European directives, such as the birds directive, and, in the longer term, the species and habitat directive.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Is the Secretary of State aware of the concern of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds about clause 11? It fears that the clause will completely tie up SNH for the first five years of its existence and effectively prevent it from taking a more active and positive role in the countryside, which is so needed? The society has said that there are about 1,300 sites of special scientific interest in Scotland, and that there is a serious prospect of several hundred public inquiries taking place at enormous public and private expense. Against that background, will the Secretary of State seriously consider dropping clause 11?

Mr. Lang: I propose to say something about clause 11 shortly. I understand the anxiety of the RSPB and of others. As the clause stands, it is virtually unworkable. The hon. Gentleman referred to about 1,300 SSSIs. If they were to be reviewed within the five years that is required by the clause, one SSSI would have to be reviewed on every working day for the first five years. The House will appreciate that such a prospect makes the clause unworkable in its present form.

The organisation will undertake its wider nature conservation responsibilities with its sister agencies in England and Wales through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and it will work within the standards, procedures, and protocols agreed by the JNCC.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): In the light of the Secretary of State's earlier comment about the organisation not being responsible for structure plans and for planning generally, how does he view designation —which is being conducted on a massive scale in parts of the highlands—as fitting in with local authority planning? There is no doubt that the two have clashed, particularly in respect of afforestation in the north.

Mr. Lang: I expect Scottish Natural Heritage to work much closer to the ground because of the dispersal of its offices. It will have 18 area offices and four regional offices, whose staff will work much more closely on a consultative and co-operative basis with local authorities, landowners and others. I anticipate that the organisation's whole tone will be very different from that sometimes perceived in the handling of such matters in the past.

Mr. Dalyell: Although Dr. O'Connor's appointment is welcome, can the Secretary of State say something about the location of the JNCC and its work programme?

Mr. Lang: I cannot do so, because the work of the JNCC does not fall within my area of responsibility. However, I emphasise that the committee will have an important role to play, and its overview will be of considerable benefit to Scottish Natural Heritage. It is my intention, and that of Magnus Magnusson, that Scottish Natural Heritage will operate in a wider context, and that it will be in tune with broader national and international consideration of conservation matters.

As to landscape protection, the Government are committed to continuing conservation of the finest Scottish landscapes. How that will be achieved in the longer term is a matter of debate in Scotland at present. The Countryside Commission for Scotland produced a report on the conservation and management of our mountain areas, and it contains many valuable ideas aimed at securing sustainable uses of the land. It makes particular suggestions for ways of building partnerships at local level, through the establishment of land management forums.

I listened with interest to the debate on the Commission's proposals to establish four national parks. No clear consensus is emerging. In Wester Ross, there is strong antipathy to such a designation. There is no enthusiasm in the Ben Nevis/Glencoe area, considerable ambivalence concerning a national park for the Cairngorms, and only apparent support for a Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park. Given those responses and in the absence of the commission's response to consultation, I cannot yet make any decisions on the proposals for special areas and for the mountain areas more generally. However, I shall be interested to hear the outcome of the consultation process undertaken by the Countryside Commission for Scotland.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): As the Secretary of State knows, I have a great interest in Loch Lomond, but he mentioned that there is only "apparent" support for a national park there. That does not agree with the information that I have been given. If I convey that information to the Secretary of State, will it influence his deliberations?

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman has information of that kind, I hope that he has already passed it to the Countryside Commission for Scotland, as part of its consultation process. I would certainly be interested to receive a copy of that information. It is worth emphasising that the interests of Loch Lomond are considerably different from those of Wester Ross, the Cairngorms, or other parts of Scotland.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Given the uncertainty of Scottish national opinion on national parks, when does the Secretary of State expect to reach a conclusion on that issue? Those who have been involved in the consultation process deserve an early answer.

Mr. Lang: I agree, and I hope to reach a conclusion soon. However, I am slightly in the hands of the Countryside Commission, which is assessing the outcome of its consultation process. I am sure that it will note the hon. Lady's comments, and mine.

It is essential that Scottish Natural Heritage has all the tools for the job that we are giving it to do. Existing designations are confined either to landscape or to nature conservation. At present, there is no integrated designation. Therefore, we intend to table an amendment to the Bill in Committee to enable natural heritage areas to be established. A single designation for the benefit of areas of the highest natural heritage interest will be an essential tool if the new body is to approach the management of

[Mr. Lang]

such areas in a positive and integrated manner, in partnership with all the relevant interests of owners, occupiers and communities.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): There is a great deal of confusion, in my experience, when one talks to interested bodies about how a natural heritage area will fit into the general pattern, and how it relates to the consideration—I put it no higher than that—of the national parks' proposition. Could the Secretary of State say a word or two more specifically about the remit of a natural heritage area? For example, will there be a body to implement the integrated planning, to which he has referred, in these schemes? Does he think that the scheme will preclude national parks?

Mr. Lang: That is an interesting question, which can perhaps be developed in Committee, but the hon. Gentleman is right to focus attention on it, because it is a new concept. I certainly agree with the implied comment in his question that there are so many different forms of designation that it is difficult for the layman to find his way around them.

Essentially, the building blocks are sites of special scientific interest in the case of the Nature Conservancy Council and national scenic areas in the case of the Countryside Commission. The natural heritage will be one form of designation which will combine the two. It will not replace an SSSI, but an NHA might easily be a substantial area, in which resources and other forms of designation might be focused.

A natural heritage area might be of a size and nature that meant that it covered an area which might otherwise be considered for designation as a national park. If I were to pronounce any more on that, I would prejudge the outcome of my decision on national parks. These matters might be more fully explored in Committee.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Andrew Welsh.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the Secretary of State and the Government's attitude towards appeal against SSSI designation?

Mr. Speaker: Actually, I called Mr. Andrew Welsh, but would the Secretary of State care to answer that question first?

Mr. Lang: I hope that I shall be able to answer both questions, but I have not heard the one from the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh).

As regards SSSIs and the right of appeal, their Lordships in another place gave close attention to that matter and have amended the Bill. We shall express our views on that matter in Committee—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] I shall have something more to say about it later in my speech.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Does the Minister agree that the people most affected, who have to live in national heritage areas or parks, should be heard? Can he guarantee that there will be maximum local input from people in such areas about when and how such decisions are taken? He mentioned sustainable growth: would he define exactly what he means by that? Also will he insert a definition of that concept—which we all support—in the Bill so that we have on record what the Government mean when they talk about encouraging the agency to support sustainable growth?

Mr. Lang: I was not quite clear about the nature of the hon. Gentleman's concern in the first part of his question. However, I expect consultation to be a strong and recurring feature of all the activities of Scottish Natural Heritage. I believe that it is central to carrying out its remit properly that there is consultation with interested parties and local bodies when it fulfils its responsibility for conserving and developing the natural heritage.

Sustainability is a concept which has been developed for a number of years, and is at the centre of the Government's environmental policy. The concept is that the environment should be so regarded and maintained that it does not erode or degrade, and is handed on to future generations in the same condition or possibly enhanced and developed. Therefore, no operation should be allowed to take place which would damage the environment without restoring or replenishing the damage.

As I have said, I have dwelt at some length on the principles and expected practice which should result from the establishment of Scottish Natural Heritage; but I should explain how we expect the Bill to achieve its purposes. Part I provides for the establishment of Scottish Natural Heritage, which will have the full range of powers currently given to the Countryside Commission for Scotland and the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland, but, with the wider definition of the natural heritage and the abolition of the concept of countryside, it will operate throughout Scotland.

Let me underline the general aims and purposes set out in clause 1. The first is to secure the conservation of the natural heritage—that is, species and habitat, areas of geological and physiographical significance and areas of natural beauty and amenity. The second is to secure the enhancement of our natural heritage; the third is to foster understanding of that heritage by increasing the degree of interest and the level of knowledge of everyone who currently has an interest. Fourthly, the new body will be able to provide—either by its own hand or through supporting others—facilities and access for the enjoyment of Scotland's natural heritage.

Finally—this is of overriding importance—we have a duty to ensure that, in its own actions and in influencing the actions of others, Scottish Natural Heritage seeks to secure the sustainablility of activities affecting the natural heritage, and hence that of the natural heritage itself. Schedule 1 makes provision for the constitution and proceedings of the body.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: The Bill states that expenditure on the body will be roughly equivalent to the amount spent on its predecessors. Can the Secretary of State specify the amount that the Government are prepared to put into it if it is to be really effective, and can he tell us whether he envisages an annual review of the amount to be made available to it? As we progress, additional money may be required.

Mr. Lang: It is certainly important that the body should be fully and adequately funded. This year, the combined

budgets of the two existing bodies will exceed £26 million: I think that that has been generally recognised as a substantial and fully adequate budget.

I can also confirm that the budget for the new body will be reviewed annually, under the public expenditure round. For that reason, I cannot give the hon. Lady a specific figure for 1992-93; clearly, however, the figure that we have established in the opening year—which is very important for the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland—lends credence to our commitment.

Mr. Dalyell: The Secretary of State said, understandably, that his fifth point was of "overriding importance", but is it really compatible with the Lords amendment? I trust that the right hon. Gentleman will tell us the Government's attitude to that amendment; some of us think that it wrecks the Bill completely.

Mr. Lang: I have already told the House that the Lords amendment about a review and appeal in relation to SSSIs is unworkable in its present form, and will have to be revised. We are still considering the precise nature of the revision, which will emerge in Committee.

Mr. Dalyell: So the Government are not rejecting the amendment?

Mr. Lang: As I have told the hon. Gentleman, we are rejecting it in its present form. I will make the Government's position clear later.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): It is important to clarify the position here and now: this is the kernel of the debate. I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees that it would be utterly irresponsible to bring the body into being while in any way accepting the wrecking amendments tabled in the House of Lords. Will he assure us that not only the letter, but the substance and the spirit, of the amendments in clause 11 will be rejected? There is no point in bringing Scottish Natural Heritage into existence if the right hon. Gentleman is going to lie down in front of the landowning lobby at the first hurdle and give anything approaching the powers suggested in clause 11.

Mr. Lang: I can assure the House that there is no question of our "lying down" in front of the landowning lobby. We are trying to achieve a proper balance in a new body that is fully committed and fully empowered to carry out its remit to preserve and enhance Scotland's natural heritage.

I have already explained that clause 11 is at present flawed and unworkable. I could give a number of precise details, but those are essentially Committee points. We shall have an opportunity to debate our proposed amendments in Committee; I can tell the House no more than that at this stage.

Mr. Dewar: I note that the Secretary of State is reluctant to be more forthcoming, but I hope that I can tempt him to be a little more helpful.

When I hear a Minister say that an amendment is flawed, I assume that technical amendments, adjustments and perhaps shifts of emphasis might make it acceptable. If I interpret correctly the views of my hon. Friends, the feeling on this side of the House is that it is not a question of the amendment's being flawed but of its being, in principle, unacceptable. It is regarded as a wrecking amendment. That is an important distinction. We want the kernel of the amendment to be rejected, since, as the Secretary of State argued, it would make the work of Scottish Natural Heritage almost impossible.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Before my right hon. Friend replies, I hope that he will permit me to say that it is absolutely essential that any site of special scientific interest should be designated as such for purely scientific reasons. Therefore, one cannot reach a layman's decision—yes or no. Due to the new regional structure, with very much closer management of the areas concerned, I believe that there will be much more discussion between the owners of SSSIs and Scottish Natural Heritage so that questions can be resolved amicably without the need to go to appeal.

Mr. Lang: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. I tried to make that point earlier, when I said that, in future, there should not be the same problems as have been encountered in the past. I hope that I can reassure the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) by saying that, apart from the clause being technically flawed, it runs counter to the Government's declared and long-established policy since 1981. It would be a fairly substantial matter if the Government were to contemplate changing that policy. We should not enter lightly into such discussions. That is why we are giving close consideration to the matter now. However, I assure the House that, well ahead of the appropriate moment in Committee, we shall make our position absolutely clear.

Mr. Maclennan: When the Secretary of State reviews the clause, I hope the he will not overlook the overriding concern that was manifested in another place: that this is a question not of landlords versus crofters, or any such primitive instinct, but of lack of accountability in designation which has led to large tracts of the north of Scotland being designated as sites of special scientific interest, to the detriment of any form of development. Those decisions have been regarded as highly controversial. The provisions of the new clause seem to be widely welcomed, at least throughout the highlands and islands of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. His intervention underlines the fact that these are not black and white issues, but are complex and diverse. That makes it all the more important, therefore, to consider the matter again.

Clause 2 sets out the general functions of Scottish Natural Heritage. I draw the attention of the House to the advisory functions of SNH. The new body will have a significant role in advising me and any other Minister on policies concerning Scotland's natural heritage. It will also have a more general advisory role on the natural heritage which should result in greater appreciation and understanding of its use and management.

In support of these advisory roles, Scottish Natural Heritage will have an important research function. We expect it to be carried out, as the subsection suggests, largely through an externally commissioned programme. Much of SNH's work will be with others. Our intention is that there should be close working with the private and voluntary sectors, which have a vital role to play in the protection, conservation, enjoyment and understanding of the natural heritage.

[Mr. Lang]

Clause 3 sets out what is commonly known as the balancing duty—in other words, the matters that SNH should take into account, where appropriate, when it is fulfilling its general aims and purposes. SNH cannot work in a vacuum from those whose activities affect the natural heritage in various ways, or from those who are affected by the need to protect and conserve the natural heritage. The essence of the balancing clause, therefore, is that SNH should take account of the needs of agriculture, fisheries and forestry, the need for social and economic development and the interests of local communities. We are committed, following consideration in another place, to reviewing the precise wording of the clause. Again, that can usefully be done in Committee.

Clause 4 and schedule 2 provide for amendment of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and other nature conservation legislation to allow for the responsibilities of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland to be undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage. They allow the SNH to perform its nature conservation functions on exactly the same basis as the Nature Conservancy Council for England and the Countryside Council for Wales.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Presumably there will still be a co-ordinating committee to link with bodies in England and Wales. Will the Committee meet at Peterborough or north of the border and elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend may not have been able to be present when the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised that point. It is not a matter on which I am able to pronounce at the moment. The joint committee is not my direct responsibility, but my hon. Friend's anxiety on that point will have been noted.

Clause 5 widens the scope of powers already available to the Countryside Commission for development projects or schemes. That has proved to be a very worthwhile power to establish demonstration projects and experiments aimed at enhancing the environment. A right of appeal was inserted in another place against development projects or schemes, but we consider that that reflects a misunderstanding of the fact that SNH will not be able to undertake development projects or schemes without the consent of the landowner. We shall wish to return to that matter in Committee.

Clause 6 deals with powers of entry for the purpose of surveying land and provides various safeguards for landowners and occupiers, including compensation for any damage caused. Clause 7 gives the Secretary of State power to pay grant to Scottish Natural Heritage. Clause 8 empowers Scottish Natural Heritage to give grants or loans for projects that will benefit the natural heritage and to set down appropriate conditions.

Clauses 9 to 13 provide various miscellaneous provisions to support the functions of Scottish Natural Heritage and the dissolution of the predecessor bodies.

Mr. Dalyell: Clauses 8 to 13 raise a substantial question. What are the Government doing to improve the designation of marine nature reserves? Only two have been developed. To one who considered the 1981 legislation in Committee, that is profoundly disappointing—one point at least on which the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) might agree. Can nothing be done under those clauses or anywhere else in the Bill to improve the MNR procedure?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is on to a fair point. On the designation of marine nature reserves or other appropriate protection areas—for example, marine conservation areas or preferred coastal conservation zones—perhaps less attention has been given to such matters in the past than is appropriate. I believe that the merging of the Countryside Commission with the Nature Conservancy Council into Scottish Natural Heritage will create a body that will more effectively be able to take a proper overview of those matters.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that consideration is currently being given to the possible designation of Loch Sween in Argyll as a possible marine SSSI under the marine nature reserve provisions. Designation is by the Secretary of State, obviously on advice. That is a matter on which I cannot pronounce any further at present, for reasons that the hon. Gentleman will understand.

In addition to all the provisions that I have mentioned, and as previously indicated, we intend to bring forward amendments in Committee for two purposes. First, we intend to seek amendment to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959 to allow the Red Deer Commission, where there is damage to the natural heritage, to exercise the same powers that it already has in relation to deer causing damage to farming and forestry. Secondly, we shall also seek approval, as I have already said, for a power to the Secretary of State to designate natural heritage areas.

I now refer briefly to part II of the Bill which contains the provisions on irrigation. Those provisions are designed to ensure that there is effective control over those abstractions which can severely damage the quality or quantity of water in our rivers and lochs and underground waters. They are modest measures designed to improve the effectiveness and widen the scope of the present legislation contained in the Spray Irrigation Act 1964. We have wanted to enact those measures for some time.

The thrust of the changes is to meet a long-standing commitment to replace with workable legislation an Act which has been on the statute book for 26 years but has, in practice, proved virtually inoperable. It is vital to maintain the quality and quantity of our water. We must ensure that rivers and streams do not dry up or become so reduced that there is a severe adverse effect on aquatic life and on the ability of a river to dilute and absorb pollution.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): When he referred to the designation of natural heritage areas, the Secretary of State said that he could probably say more to enlighten us on just exactly what they should be.

Mr. Lang: In answer to a supplementary question, I explained some of our thinking. I also said that we intended to table an amendment in Committee on natural heritage areas. Until we do so, it would be best to keep my powder dry, but I welcome the hon. Gentleman's close interest and look forward to further expanding on our thinking in Committee.

The measures in part III deal with the supply of water during times of drought. They will replace existing provisions in the Water (Scotland) Act 1980 with provisions already available in England and Wales under

the Water Act 1989. The central change is that the new provisions will allow authorities more flexibility in meeting any deficiencies in supply due to exceptional shortage of rain.

Contrary to popular belief, Scotland sometimes suffers from just such a problem. In the particularly dry year of 1984 which affected much of the country, rainfall was only 40 per cent. of the average between April and August. This shortage had a marked detrimental effect on rivers and the flora and fauna which they sustain. Flows were seriously affected and reservoir levels dropped.

There are also more localised drought problems from time to time. Last year, for example, drought orders were made in both the Fife and the Borders regions.

While it is true to say that authorities have coped well in the past, the lessons learned have brought widespread agreement that a more flexible regime for those who have to deal with the problem is needed. These new provisions will also make water management in such situations consistent throughout Great Britain.

We are also taking the opportunity of the Bill to make several minor amendments to existing water legislation. They are, first, to make specific provision on control of water pollution to empower the Secretary of State to make regulations giving effect to international and EC obligations; secondly, we shall amend the Water (Scotland) Act 1980 to ensure that river purification boards are consulted by water authorities in pursuance of some of their responsibilities under the Act; thirdly, the Bill will supplement powers to make regulations under the Water (Scotland) Act 1980; lastly, we intend to modify the membership arrangements for river purification boards.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Secretary of State accept that what he calls fairly minor regulations raise questions of staffing? At first sight, these so-called minor regulations require a good deal of staff, as do many of the other proposed measures. What is the position on chronic understaffing? In many of the briefings and discussions that we have had, it has been stressed that staffing is a real problem when implementing the measures. Before the Secretary of State finishes his speech, will he say something about the shortage of staff?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will know from the front of the Bill the effect that it will have on public service manpower. Some additional staff will be required by the new body to ensure that it can address the Government's priorities for Scotland's natural heritage. We anticipate a staff of 450 in total. That will be an increase on the previous number of staff. Indeed, an increase of 140 staff is already in train as a result of the transfer from Peterborough to Scotland of Nature Conservancy Council responsibilities. We do not envisage any substantial direct increases in staff to arise from water considerations.

The establishment of Scottish Natural Heritage illustrates both our commitment to the work of the predecessor bodies and the need for an integrated approach in future. More importantly, it clearly signals our commitment to the unique and priceless natural heritage of Scotland, which is the envy of all who visit Scotland and the pride of all of us who live there. It truly represents our inheritance from the past—the land and landscape and the flora and fauna bequeathed by nature, and all the changes which have occured to them as a result of the activities or our predecessors.

We must not be complacent, if we are to bequeath our inheritance to future generations in a way which will sustain their well-being. That can be achieved only if we manage our resources, both natural and human, with great care. We cannot afford to allow activities which undermine the natural resource base so that it is not usable in the longer term. However, that does not mean putting a stop to all economic activity in the countryside. Far from it: our policy is based on the encouragement of environmentally sensitive and sustainable use of our natural heritage and the encouragement of economic activity which sustains and even strengthens and enhances its environment.

Scottish Natural Heritage has a focal role to play in achieving those aims. That is why we brought together nature and landscape conservation and recreational access and enjoyment functions. That will make possible the integrated approach to which I referred. As I have already said, SNH cannot carry out the task on its own. It must seek out and cultivate a range of partners to achieve our wider objectives. It will seek to develop initiatives with local communities, landowners and other local interests. It will work jointly with Government Departments and public bodies and seek to stimulate the work of the voluntary sector. We have given it all the powers in the Bill that it requires to undertake this task. Later this year, I shall make decisions about the funding of the new body and the appointment of board members to support Magnus Magnusson. I shall consider proposals for the location, organisational structure and staffing of the new body.

We are the custodians of our heritage. We hold it in trust. We have a tremendous opportunity now to build a positive partnership which will sustain our heritage for future generations. I hope that both sides of the House will support this approach and welcome the establishment of Scottish Natural Heritage. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.40 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): In a narrow sense, this is a Bill which we should cherish. It is the one and only Bill produced by the Scottish Office this parliamentary Session. It is a modest return for, presumably, a great deal of thought and effort. We should perhaps be grateful for that, considering the damage done in previous years by the current Scottish Office team.

This is an important Bill and we shall take it seriously in Committee. It deals with an area of policy which, unfortunately, may lend itself to rhetoric. Inevitably, sometimes the rhetoric sounds a little empty in the abstract. I take as an example of that the introduction by the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) to "Scotland's Natural Heritage" in which he said:

> "We must improve understanding, increase awareness, promote co-operation and find ways of allowing our rural communities to grow and prosper by managing natural resources wisely and well."

We are also against sin and in favour of better weather. There is something unexceptionable about those sentiments, but I am not sure that they advance the cause of conservation greatly. Passages of the Secretary of State's speech, when reread at leisure by anyone who has the temerity to do so, might fall into the same category.

We are being offered a new framework—Scottish Natural Heritage. According to the Secretary of State, it

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

will translate into more effective action. We want more effective action and a better, more enduring framework than has been possible in the past. There have been arguments about whether this is the right starting point. We have had our complaints, particularly that the early proposals were ill digested and lacked specification. That is still partly true.

For some splendid generalisations, I can do no better than go back to the original discussion document, "Scotland's Natural Heritage", which is a rather pleasant, moss green colour and has a stag at bay on its front cover. It told us about the end of the ice age and the demise of the wolf, and a great deal about

"the mountain plateaux with a ptarmigan and other arctic-alpine fauna and flora, the native woodlands with capercaillie, Scottish crossbill, pine marten and wild cat, the peatland 'flows' with their concentration of rare waders . . . golden eagles, the machair grasslands . . . the last haven in Britain of the corncrake".

That took up a great deal of the five pages which were to be the blueprint for the future. I say with no sarcasm that I got the impression that they might have been written by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton). At least we have advanced some way since then.

There has not been much consultation, although some of the claims about that have been fanciful. A written answer on 11 July 1989 to a question from the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) gave a list of the various voluntary conservation bodies and groups which supported the Government's proposals. I was astonished when I read their representations to discover that many were not in favour. Some specifically did not comment because they had been told that the essential scheme was not open for consultation; only how it was to be implemented. Therefore, they passed no words on it. There were great difficulties in those early stages.

Since then we have had the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and we are now at stage two. I want to make it clear on behalf of Labour Members that we have no intention of dividing the House against the Bill. We have not even tabled an amendment in our name. We are interested in clearing up a large number of ambiguities and focusing on the essentials in Committee. Our interest is in making a success of Scottish Natural Heritage when it comes into being. I am sure that the whole House will be united on that.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend said that we have no intention of dividing the House. Indeed, that was agreed by everybody before the debate began, but the Secretary of State's attitude to the fundamental Lords amendments has put a rather different complexion on that. Some of us, naturally in consultation with our colleagues, would like to leave open the question of a Division, because the goods put forward are different from what we thought we were being offered.

Mr. Dewar: I certainly intend to return to the Lords amendments and I hear what my hon. Friend said. I hasten to assure him that anything I may say does not necessarily bind him. I have long recognised that as a fact, even if it is not necessarily the theory. No doubt we can discuss this during the debate, but I take his serious point about what the Secretary of State said.

The Bill is concise, with only 13 clauses, but because of that it sketches the situation only briefly and inevitably raises many questions which I should like to draw to the attention of the House. Perhaps I may do so with the promise, not the threat, that we shall want to return to those issues in Committee.

There has been a great deal of comment about the word "sustainable" in clause 1(1). I think that every hon. Member has received representations about it. I welcome the concept, but it is difficult to define. In another place Lord Strathclyde—I notice that these days we are being invited on television to get to know and love that gentleman as "Tom Strathclyde"—said that "sustainable" meant securing the inheritance of future generations, but his attempts to define it beyond that were not helpful. It is easy to comprehend what sustainable means for forestry or fishing policy, but beyond those rather obvious examples it becomes less clear.

We shall try to return to that in Committee, although I am assured by my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) that anyone who comes up with something approaching a definition would have to be a latter-day Wittgenstein, so we shall see what emerges. Even if we cannot define the term, we should get a rather better view from the Government than has been possible so far of their intention. That is a matter of some importance.

My second point will come as no surprise to those who have been following the debate. It relates to the remit of SNH. There is an absence of any duty to encourage access to recreation in the countryside. Several bodies whose views I respect have put that to us. I recognise that there is always a possibility of saying that that is encompassed in the purpose of the SNH

"to foster understanding and facilitate the enjoyment of the natural heritage of Scotland".

It is a matter not only of emphasis, but of symbolic importance, and certainly it has caused some concern.

There have been suggestions, for example, that there is a difference of approach built on the different remits of the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission for Scotland on this matter. That may be worthy of consideration. As the House will not be surprised to hear, we have also been approached by the Scottish Sports Council. It takes the view, as does the Countryside Commission for Scotland, that a reference specifically to access and recreation should be included. The Scottish Sports Council news release states:

"However, the Council believes that the access and recreation role currently carried out by the Commission will not be as effective after a merger with the Nature Conservancy Council."

I hope that that is not so. It would be an argument against the merger altogether. It is important in giving reassurance against those fears for a specific remit on access and recreation to be included. Again, we shall return to that in Committee.

Other balancing considerations must be taken up by Scottish Natural Heritage, one of which is the lack of reference to archaeological heritage. That consideration may not arise often and I mention it only in passing, but it is worth further thought. Perhaps the Minister—I presume that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West will be in charge of the Committee on a day-to-day basis—will bear that in mind when considering the amendments.

I shall now deal with the Lords amendments, which are becoming increasingly contentious. As I understand it,

there are two, not just one. The first relates to the general power that has been given to SNH in clause 5. In another place they added subsections (4) and (5) to clause 5. They did so, it seems, due to a somewhat excitable—I hope that not one will resent the term—view of the way in which the new body might operate and of the likely relevance of the powers defined in clause 5. They permit the SNH to

"prepare proposals with respect to any area for a development project or scheme which is designed to achieve the conservation or enhancement of or which fosters understanding or enjoyment of the natural heritage of Scotland."

That was seen by a number of their Lordships as a new and threatening departure from the legal framework with which we are familiar. Perhaps my colleagues noticed some of the more racy international metaphors used to describe that threat. I am thinking in particular of Lady Saltoun of Abernethy, who went a mile on the issue during the debates. I was also interested in the views of the Baroness Strange, a lady with whom I am not familiar. She concluded that clause 5 was, as drafted, of all the horrific prospects, a breach of the declaration of Arbroath. That suggestion seemed to be taken surprisingly seriously by the Minister, but perhaps it gives a flavour of the exchanges.

I undertook some in-depth research and looked up Baroness Strange in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion". I found that she is the author of the important works "Lalage in Love", "Love from Belinda" and "Creatures Great and Small", which is perhaps more relevant. I asked the Library to produce those seminal texts for my consideration, but, unfortunately, I am left to imagine what delights must be included. In any event, the House should join me in assuring Baroness Strange that the declaration of Arbroath—or the declaration of independence in Arbroath, which is how she referred to it—would not be affected by the Bill.

The Lords amendments are intended to make clause 5 unworkable. In effect, the Secretary of State acknowledged that. I have considered the legal forms in the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 and other legislation and the phrases contained in clause 5 are very familiar and have been used before. I do not believe that the fears expressed can be defended. I hope that the Minister will be prepared to excise the amendments, which were added under a misapprehension.

The situation resulting from clause 11 is even more serious. There have already been exchanges on this issue. There is no doubt that, if the clause remains as drafted and inserted by another place, it will tie up resources, as the Minister agreed. It will undermine the credibility of SNH in its early and formative period.

I am told that there are more than 1,200 sites of special scientific interest in Scotland—one colleague says that there are 1,300 and I am prepared to come and go on the odd 100. Annexe D of the Government paper, "Scotland's Natural Heritage: The Way Ahead", implies the formidable task of a review of every one of those SSSIs in the first five years of SNH. There have been representations against that by every body that has bothered to comment on the Bill, whether it be the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Rural Forum or the Scottish Wildlife Trust. They have written to me to implore wholeheartedly that the clause be removed from the Bill.

In any event the clause is based on a misunderstanding. Clearly, an SSSI is a notification of the scientific value of a particular area. It is not in itself the imposition of a prohibition order. It is an obligation on a landlord to consult the present Nature Conservancy Council and, in future, SNH during consideration of potentially damaging operations. The process goes on to produce the possibility of a voluntary management agreement to preserve the scientific interest of the area.

I am told—I unashamedly admit that these figures came from the World Wide Fund for Nature—that, in the NCC's north-west Scotland area, there are some 330 SSSIs, involving about 2,500 landholders. Many SSSIs cross different areas of ownership. There are about 60 current management agreements and about 25 under negotiation. In other words, the vast majority do not reach the point where there is a need to think in terms of a current management agreement. A landowner has the right to refuse to sign a management agreement if he is dissatisfied with the compensation offered, but, given the number of SSSIs in that area, that has not happened once in the past 10 years.

The clause, as drafted, would create considerable difficulties. I recognise that the Secretary of State wishes, rather quaintly, to keep his powder dry, but I should have thought that, by this stage, we should have been given a clear suggestion of the Government's intention. The difficulty is that he has agreed, by implication at least, and sometimes explicitly, with all the criticisms. He has conceded that the Bill will be practically unworkable, especially if clause 11 survives, but, oddly, he holds back from saying that it should go and that the Government will not accept the spirit of the amendments.

At the end of the debate, I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will be a little more forthcoming and explain the situation. After all, in another place the amendments were passed rather quickly. It was unusual, because the Labour party voted with Ministers yet still managed to lose. The payroll vote bit the dust in no uncertain fashion. I presume that Ministers knew what they were doing when they stood against the wrath of the landowning interests on the basis of the merits of the proposition. The Minister should have the courage of Tom Strathclyde and, in this rather gentler climate, fall in with the worries and anxieties that have been expressed not just here but throughout the conservation world and to me. I hope that we shall hear more from the Minister before the end of the debate. I give way to the voice of dissent.

Mr. Maclennan: The process of designation, which has been the subject of amendment to clause 11, may concern designation of a scientific nature alone, but it is challenged not only on scientific grounds by people who have no means of carrying the debate further as the law stands, but on the grounds of the economic consequences of designation. The absence of accountability in existing law is unacceptable and it is that with which the other place tried to deal. The hon. Gentleman tried to press the Secretary of State to be more forthcoming about his view of that problem. The hon. Gentleman might choose this opportunity to be forthcoming about the Labour party's awareness of the problem that the other place was facing up to.

Perhaps their Lordships did not have the right answer, but I should like to know what view the Labour party takes. The law as it stands is not working to the

[Mr. Maclennan]

satisfaction of those people—crofters, farmers, landowners, foresters and many others—who have a much greater interest then do some of the bodies to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Dewar: I understand the vehemence with which the hon. Gentleman makes his point. It is not clear to me how the Liberal peers voted. Perhaps they voted in favour of clause 11. No doubt the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), who speaks for her party on these issues, will make it clear whether she is in favour of retaining clause 11. I shall be very surprised if it turns out to be so, but no doubt we shall have the matter clarified shortly. I have explained that an SSSI, as I understand it, implies scientific value.

If one of the potentially damaging operations is proposed, the landholder has an obligation to consult. However, even at that stage, the operation can be stopped only by management agreement with the landlord. In such cases it is always necessary to strike a balance. No doubt the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), by virtue of his constituency interest, is aware of the report "Management Agreements for Nature Conservation in Scotland", issued by Aberdeen university in 1990. That document certainly drew attention to the need for better consultation.

We are setting up a new devolved structure, involving regional and area provision, which is being pioneered by the NCC in its interregnum Scottish year. On the basis of advice that I received recently, I am of the opinion that the problems are not as insurmountable or as jagged as the hon. Gentleman suggests. The representations that have been made to me, from a remarkable range of people, have certainly persuaded me that clause 11 is wrong. I am sorry if the Liberal party intends to vote in support of the clause, but that seems to be the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I await clarification.

Sir Hector Monro: I do not know all the Liberal Democratic peers intimately, but it seems to me that three of them voted in favour of clause 11, and one against.

Mr. Dewar: That does not surprise me. The intervention that we just heard clearly shows a great deal of support for the clause. Many Scottish peers—Lord Thurso in particular—were prominent in the debate.

Having taken some time to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point, as it is important, I want to move on and probe for a few minutes another very important matter. The Secretary of State referred to it, but I found his attitude unsatisfactory. I refer to the natural heritage areas—a very substantial issue and a matter of some mystery to many of us. I understand that amendments are to be tabled. I have made earnest inquiries among interested parties and I have been told repeatedly that no one knows what a natural heritage area is, or how it fits into the great scheme of things. It is with no sarcasm that I say that it seems to have been spirited up, as there was not even the suspicion of its appearance during the consultative process. It comes at a very odd time.

The Scottish Countryside Commission's document "The Mountain Areas of Scotland" proposes the creation of four national parks. One of these is in the Cairngorms. I believe that we are in danger of ending up with a hopelessly cluttered situation that no reasonable person could be expected to understand. I am told—perhaps it is only rumour, or I may be under a misapprehension—that the flow country, which is certainly of interest to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, and the Cairngorms are likely early candidates for natural heritage status.

Indeed, Cairngorm is almost certainly an early candidate. The Government, for reasons of prestige, are attempting to have that area designated as a world heritage site. We know that it is also potentially a national park and, on top of all that, Mr. Magnus Magnusson's working party is examining future strategies for the management of the Cairngorms under what appear to be very comprehensive terms of reference. We now have layer upon layer upon layer, and it beggars the imagination to discover where definition and authority lie.

There are some questions to which we shall expect answers in Committee and in this regard we shall no doubt be joined by Conservative Members. How do natural heritage agencies relate to national parks? Does the one preclude the other? What will be the remit of a natural heritage agency? Is there a management body at all, or is it merely a question of designation, which will be implemented by some other, as yet unknown, body? If so, will that be a national park? If not, who?

If the natural heritage area is going to set out a programme of management, that programme will have to be implemented either by the area itself—in which case, the national park is precluded—or by some competitor for the responsibility. If there is to be a body, who will be represented on it? What will be its relationship to SNH? What powers of last resort, if any, will it have? It should be clear to the Minister that a large number of legitimate questions must be answered. It is proper that those questions be raised in this debate and in Committee.

"Scottish Environment News" in November 1990 quotes the Under-Secretary of State as having said:

> "A common theme in the CCS's recent report on mountain areas is the need for an integrated strategy. The Cairngorm Working party might serve as a prototype for bringing together relevant interested parties to create similar strategies for other parts of Scotland."

I am not clear about the meaning of that. It seems to suggest that there will be working parties in other areas. But it suggests also that this working party will operate very much on the themes set out in the Countryside Commission's document on mountain areas. That simply adds to the general confusion and the pattern of overlapping responsibilities that we appear to be facing. It is an unsatisfactory situation, which the Minister will have to try to clear up, so that the layman may have some chance of understanding not only the Government's intentions but likely developments on the ground over the next year or two.

The debate on national parks still has some way to go. I realise that the results of the consultations have not yet been published. The Countryside Commission hope that they will be available to the Secretary of State some time in March and I hope that they will be made available to a wider audience very shortly thereafter. It seems that there is a case for considering together the Scottish heritage area concept and the national park concept. I have some sympathy with a point that has been put to me forcefully; that, to use a cliché of the Government, unless they are considered together, we shall not have a level playing field.

There is a danger that implementation of the natural heritage area will prejudice further debate on the national park proposal.

I welcome the Scottish Countryside Commission's proposals. Here is a case that has strength and that must be examined very closely. The idea that there should be an over-arching body looking at the problems of sensitive areas, where several local authorities and many conservation bodies and groups have an interest, is sensible. It is, of course, important that there be strong links with the communities concerned. It is important that the creation of a national park should not be seen as a means of sealing off an area, choking development and leaving communities in a state of suspended animation.

The Secretary of State made it clear that that was not his intention. If we go further down this road, we must make it very clear to the people who live in these areas. Many of them live in large communities, such as Fort William, which is included in the Ben Nevis/Glencoe/Black Mount area and is part of the community zoned within that proposed national park. It is the main centre of population in Lochaber.

If we are to have national parks, we must take the opportunity of balancing conservation and development, forestry and agriculture, and tourism and recreation more successfully than in the past. I welcome the fact that the Countryside Commission is proposing that two thirds of the board should come from local authority members and one third should be appointed by the Secretary of State. The emphasis on locally elected members is probably wise and would reassure those who fear a rigidly imposed structure from outside the area.

I firmly believe that consultation is a key issue. I was interested that the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) contained a reference to marine reserves. Judging by the correspondence that I have received, it is clear that, however good the Loch Sween proposal may be—perhaps it has captured the imagination of those who live on the shores of Loch Sween, but not in the way that the proposers would wish—there are lessons to be learnt. I am sure that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute will want to raise that matter later.

The debate on the national parks should be joined. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) may wish to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to put forcefully the case for the Loch Lomond area. That is a special case, for which there are strong arguments because two district—two regional—councils are involved. The area is under particular pressure because of its geography and its ease of access from heavily populated districts. I know that many of the local authorities are particularly attracted by grant structures that might meet 85 per cent. of expenditure—there is nothing dishonourable about that. As a countryside park, it does much worse than that, and I see that the grant structure is a pressing incentive.

There are many views on the subject. The World Wild Fund for Nature is cautious and has doubts, the World Conservation Union is enthusiastic, and there is a range of opinions in between. We want a constructive debate held in a flexible, sensible spirit, that recognises the sensitivities which arise. We must look carefully at the results of the consultation which may not be as hostile as the Secretary of State hinted when he gave his summary of local reaction. I promise you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that my colleagues will return to the subject in Committee.

I shall wrap up my argument by quickly covering one or two important issues. Such debates always contain issues that should be, but are not, on the agenda. I do not know whether we shall manage to include everything we want in Committee. It would be a pity if there were no debate on the Crown Estate commissioners and their role, particularly in connection with fish farming. The 1990 report of the Select Committee on Agriculture said that the Crown Estates commissioners had at least 709 sites for salmon and shellfish farms, of which 698 were in Scotland. Clearly, the commissioners' power is considerable. There are problems with the dominance of large companies, the tying-up of good sites on long leases and how to get local people and capital involved. There have undoubtedly been great problems with consultation.

We believe that there should be planning control over fish farm sites. That subject may arise during further discussion on the Bill. I am sure that the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and others involved will anticipate my saying that forestry is another matter of great concern in terms of achieving the right balance in conservation. Planting has declined considerably since the change in tax concessions. I am told—I do not know whether the figures are accurate—that planting has declined from 27,000 to 12,000 hectares annually, but the Government target, which has not changed, remains at 3,000 hectares per annum. The theory is that unfortunate planting can be controlled by witholding grants, and that power is open to the Forestry Commission. However, I am advised that there is still significant planting without grants and there remains the question of whether the Forestry Commission is the right organisation to impose controls. An extension of the present planning control system should be studied closely and my hon. Friends will want to put forward arguments on that subject.

The Secretary of State said that Scottish National Heritage will have a major task, and for once I believe him. It is an important organisation. I should declare that I have had the opportunity of talking to some of the staff recently. Change is always unsettling, even if it brings new challenges. Magnus Magnusson's appointment will be widely welcomed, although I am not sure whether he is as big in bridge-building as the Secretary of State would have us believe. It is important that the board is appointed quickly and that a chief executive is in post, so that decisions can be taken reasonably rapidly. The basic principles of integration must be thought out. For example, it is not for me to express a personal preference on the siting of the headquarters, but following my occasional visits to Battleby I feel that it could be a persuasive contender because of its geography and facilities. I recognise that there are plenty of other places that I have not seen, and there must be considerations unknown to me, but I have always been impressed by what Battleby has to offer.

I recognise, too, that guarantees have been given to the staff about job security and about protection from predators, but there is still a great deal of work to be done. The Secretary of State may be able to confirm that the Ernst and Young report on the "Analysis of the Operational Options" in connection with SNH is now available in the Library. It contains much important information that we shall wish to assess in Committee.

I am afraid that resources are inevitably a key factor. The current budget for the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland is £19·6 million, and for the Countryside

[Mr. Dewar]

Commission for Scotland, £6·5 million, which squares roughly with the global total mentioned by the Secretary of State.

I am not happy that the Bill's explanatory memorandum states that we are to have a combined budget

"only slightly more than the sum of expenditure on the predecessor bodies."

I hope that it is in real terms, because if it is only slightly more in cash terms, it may not take account of inflation. Undoubtedly, there will be the additional expenses of setting up the devolved machinery and the inevitable costs of integration and amalgamation. I hope that we shall not undergo the sort of disappointing experiences that we had with the setting up of a different organisation, Scottish Enterprise, where, in real terms, we are not even receiving the standstill budget that we were promised on many occasions.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does the hon. Gentleman propose that more money should be spent on those two organisations in future?

Mr. Dewar: I am saying that, if we give them increased responsibility and substantially increased costs of amalgamation that will eat into the money that they have for their central purposes, we must consider their position sympathetically. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), who has sat through the debate with great patience, would be the first to agree. I suspect that it may be noticed that he has been drafted on to the Committee, on which I commiserate with him, but I look forward to his contributions in this debate.

I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Dumfries will undoubtedly be on the Committee—he cannot escape and I know that he has a great deal of expertise to offer as a member of the national Nature Conservancy Council in recent years. The hon. Member for Wyre will be one of the —to use an ugly term—"outlanders" serving on the Committee. I hope that, for all that, he will take a constructive part, not simply as the chorus in unison as the Whips instruct when there are Divisions.

Mr. Mans: How can the hon. Gentleman say that?

Mr. Dewar: I am delighted to accept the hon. Gentleman's assurance that he would be incapable of such a spineless approach.

I have detained the House long enough. There are undoubtedly sensitive issues at stake. Subtle and often conflicting pressures arise. The Opposition's only wish is to get the Bill right and try to ensure that Scottish Natural Heritage gets off to a sound start and provides an effective framework for the future.

5.19 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am full of enthusiasm for the Bill and warmly thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for introducing it, and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) for his comments. I shall pick up the hon. Gentleman's two major criticisms of clauses 5 and 11, but I was pleased by his overall approach to what looks like being a constructive and interesting Committee stage.

Those who read, and the luckier ones who listened, to the speech by Magnus Magnusson to a forum on Skye on 2 February will have been uplifted by what he said. He brilliantly set out an agenda for Scottish Natural Heritage, and his hopes, aspirations and determination to carry through a wide remit.

Magnus Magnusson was full of positive thinking on how the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland would be welded together in a year's time, and how each had much to give each other. The future holds no bounds. I should like to quote the distinguished director of the NCC for Scotland, Dr. John Francis, who has been supportive in the consultative and legislative period. He said:

"Conservation will ride on the crest of a wave."

That is true, and although few hon. Members are present, we are laying down legislation of which all of us will be proud in the future.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to my involvement in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and since then as a member of the Nature Conservancy Council. I am confident that we are taking an important step forward, because we have the will, the resources and the vision. It is up to us in Scotland to prepare the rightful destiny for our conservation, wildlife and heritage.

That contrasts with the rather negative thinking of the NCC in Peterborough when this original concept was introduced. It found difficulty with many solutions, but the majority of council members welcomed the devolution of the NCC to England, Wales and Scotland.

Two important steps were taken that removed many of the original doubts, the first of which was the introduction of the Joint Nature Conservancy Committee under the distinguished chairmanship of Sir Frederick Holliday; nobody could have been more involved in conservation than him, besides being a distinguished scientist. The second step was to overcome the criticism that there would be inadequate resources.

We should consider the Government's response to that criticism. For England, Wales and Scotland in 1990-91, £45 million was given to the Nature Conservancy Council, whereas, for 1991-92, the Government have announced that England will receive £32·4 million, Scotland £19 million, Wales £14·5 milion and the residuary body, which is tying up the loose ends, £1 million, making a total of £67 million, and £1 million for the pension fund. In real terms, £22 million extra will be spent on nature conservation, which is far more than most of the voluntary organisations, and certainly the Nature Conservancy Council, thought that the Government would give in this financial year, bearing in mind the fact that the economic situation is not as easy as we should like.

During the passage of the Environmental Protection Bill, I was surprised that the Opposition were so opposed to the devolution of the three nature conservancy councils. I am glad that they have been converted to common sense and see the way forward. Rightly, the issue of staff was frequently raised in debates on the devolution of the three NCCs. However, they were reassured by Ministers, and rightly so, because we need more staff. I acknowledge that some staff might experience inconvenience in moving from one area to another, but I am sure that they will feel part of a significant whole.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the hon. Gentleman confident that he can persuade his Government of the need to give money to pay the new staff whom he says are needed?

Sir Hector Monro: As the hon. Gentleman knows, they are civil servants, and their pay is agreed between the Government and the civil service. They are on the payroll of the Government. The staff are in place, are enjoying their work and are looking forward with confidence.

I have been a long-term advocate of devolving the three NCCs, and I welcomed the publication of "Scotland's Natural Heritage: The Way Ahead" in 1989. I have always felt that, if anything needs a local touch, it is nature conservation, but that that was not being achieved when the NCC was based in Peterborough. It lacked credibility as one saw when one spoke to people in Caithness and Sutherland. Scotland will have its own scientific team, which will have the opportunity of using the immense resources of the Scottish universities to help with conservation and research. Whether it be based in Edinburgh, Battleby or wherever—I should hate to lose Battleby or our offices in Edinburgh—it will be a first-class step forward.

I must emphasise the quality of the chairmen of the three NCCs. Magnus Magnusson, the Earl of Cranbrook, who is one of the greatest authorities on the environment and the habitat, Michael Griffiths of the NCC of Wales and Fred Holliday of the JNCC would not have come forward if they were not confident that they would have the resources, teamwork and vision to proceed with the Government's proposals. I am glad that the rearguard action is now tailing off and that the new councils are settling down under their new chairmen and believe that the way ahead is all clear for conservation and the habitat.

The opponents, or the last ditch, one might say, were in the other place. We have already heard about its debates on clause 11 and clause 5. The debate on clause 11 was on a procedural issue, because it had got into a bit of nonsense over it all and had to debate the wrong amendment in order to debate something at all. It then passed it without understanding the consequences.

It would be nonsense to re-notify all the sites of special scientific interest in Scotland. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow knows, that was one of the early tasks of the NCC after the 1981 Act, and it has only just been completed after eight years of work. One's mind boggles at the thought of what the other place could impose on Scotland's natural heritage.

I see the point, made clearly by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), that an SSSI is the subject of a scientific judgment and that, under the legislation, that judgment is not open to appeal. Many people would, of course, like to object. There are three matters to be considered. First, the judgment has to be scientific. Secondly, under our new regional structure we shall have four regions and many district offices. Thirdly, there will be new regional boards with local chairmen and local members and they will be able to explain to the owners of SSSIs exactly what they are trying to do and set out the scientific reasons. Such reasons must always be the test. Local consultations conducted by distinguished people will take the sting out of the matter. I am pleased at the membership of the new north-west region.

There will be deep argument in Committee about whether to have some sort of appeals body. It could well be on the lines of a regional advisory committee which deals with forestry. Such a committee consists of nine people, some of whom are appointed, and contains foresters, people from local authorities and those with an interest in the environment, and decides whether a planting grant is appropriate. Something along those lines, but not a judicial or statutory appeal body, could advise an owner on whether he had a case.

We need to deal with the officialdom of what is known in the SSSI world as the PDO, the potentially damaging operation. There are 25 or perhaps 50 things that one cannot do with one's own SSSI. People who look at that list tend to go into orbit and say, "This will ruin my estate for ever." However, when the prohibitions are looked at one by one, it will be seen that the NCC would allow about 99 per cent. of them. I appreciate Magnus Magnusson's view that the PDO system should be changed to a more friendly nomenclature—for example, "operations requiring consultation". That would go some way towards removing some of the present objections.

An area structure of four main regions with many regional offices is important. At the moment, the NCC in the west of Scotland is based on Loch Lomond. That covers the whole of Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway and is rather remote, even though there is an area office in Dalbeattie. To strengthen the NCC in Scotland, we will need more officers in Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Argyllshire. We must also keep a close watch on the island of Rhum, which is the jewel in the crown of the Nature Conservancy Council.

There is much to be pleased about. The Research and Development Board for Science will be based in Scotland, either in Edinburgh or Battleby. It will be under the chairmanship of Professor Dunnett and should do a great deal, especially to educate Scottish children about the importance of the Scottish environment.

The Countryside Commission for Scotland is under the excellent chairmanship of Roger Carr. One cannot speak about that commission without mentioning Jean Balfour who was chairman for 10 years and did a great deal to bring the Commission to life. The commission is only half the age of the NCC and could not be expected to have as much experience. However, it has completed much good work, including work on the southern upland way, which is known to me and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and has produced a book entitled "The Mountain Areas of Scotland" which will be one of our bibles in Committee. The book and its photographs of the magnificent landscape that we are setting out to protect show what the Bill is all about.

The arguments about national parks are interesting, but I have the feeling that the wrong conclusion has been reached. When I was a Minister in the Department of the Environment one of my responsibilities was looking after the national parks and I do not think that a bureaucratic set-up on top of Scotland's own structure will sit comfortably in our land. That is worth a great deal of consideration in Committee.

The Committee will have much to discuss about marine nature reserves, a subject that is close to the heart of the hon. Member for Linlithgow. There is extreme difficulty in getting agreement among the many organisations involved in marine reserves. That is why there are only two—one in England and one in Wales. The Loch Sween project has been shuffling along for a long time. I sail on that loch and sometimes anchor my boat near where I think I might get

[Sir Hector Monro]

a bottle of Drambuie. It is a beautiful place, except for the caravan sites on its shore, which are an eyesore. The problem is not on or under the water.

The Committee will discuss country traditions and, I hope, the importance to rural economies of country sports that bring so much money to them. We could look at the many problems such as the geese on Isla, a subject which is of interest to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). There are increasing stocks of barnacle and whitefront geese, but we never seem to find long-term answers to the problems.

There were lengthy debates in the other place about red deer. The Deer (Scotland) Act 1959 and the one that I put through the House in 1982 deal with that subject. We must strengthen the Red Deer Commission. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Garscadden does not seem to agree. We must insist that Scottish Natural Heritage consults formally and statutorily with the Red Deer Commission. There must be some joint policy for red deer in Scotland. The Red Deer Commission has a great fund of knowledge, but it has had no way of getting its policies implemented in Scotland. That is the key point. We should not leave the matter to the NCC for Scotland. I am not at all happy about the policies on red deer followed by the NCC for Scotland, and I formally opposed them.

Mr. Dewar: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important to have some coherent policy on red deer. There are enormous arguments about the cull and the excess of hinds. Do we need the Red Deer Commission, or could the matter be taken over by Scottish Natural Heritage?

Sir Hector Monro: In that context, the composition of SNH is important. One needs people who have a feel for deer and who know something about them. Managing deer forests in Scotland to the best advantage has a long tradition. As the hon. Gentleman says, there are too many hinds and far too few stags. We must have a massive hind cull. That is not easy, because the day is short in the highlands, especially in the western highlands, and there is little time to go out and shoot hinds in January or thereabouts when the stalkers are doing their best. We must work on that.

The record of the NCC on red deer has not been good and that may be due to the lack of practical knowledge. Rhum has the finest deer herd in Scotland; a policy of no culling, which was about to be started, would have destroyed the quality of the herd. The exception is the sanctuary area, where Professor Clutton-Brock runs so much good research with Fiona Guinness. Fortunately, we have changed the no cull policy.

I have not been the least bit happy with the issue of Craig Meagaidh, where we have wrongly made the habitat and the establishment of trees and vegetation of far greater importance than the deer, the herd of which has been dramatically reduced in number—I might even say that it had been slaughtered. That has immediate repercussions on the deer forests round about. We must look at them collectively, and that is why we must give much more importance to the Red Deer Commission and the formal relationship between it and SNH. We must get deer herd management in Scotland right, bringing in the owners and those who know something about the management of deer forests.

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the Red Deer Commission and its role. Does not that example show that part of the difficulty that we face in bringing together all these different interests is that there is no ultimately truthful scientific view about what is the right thing to do? We are seeking to reconcile different interests, and if decision making is left in the hands of one body, instead of having a scientific answer, one has a value judgment.

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman is probably right. It is a value judgment, and there are not scientific arguments. There are so many problems such as fencing, the Forestry Commission and even the price of venison, which varies significantly, depending on the price in the continental market and the development of farmed deer in Scotland. Despite this host of problems, as red deer mean so much to Scotland, we must make management of the herds a high priority.

In Committee, we shall be looking at the marine nature reserves, nature conservation SSSIs and the Cairngorms, and all the problems that we have had there with tourist development. As the hon. Member for Garscadden said, we shall want to look into the defintion and practical application of the proposed world heritage designation, of the Cairngorms. If we have too many different designations, we shall devalue them all. Nobody will know where we are.

The key issue is maintenance and development of the magnificent quality of our landscape. We must think in terms of environmentally sensitive areas, which are funded by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland rather than the environment side of the Scottish Office. This is an important way forward, and we should look towards developing environmentally sensitive areas in more parts of Scotland, so that those areas can receive management agreements, which are helpful when farming is going through such a difficult economic period, particularly in the hills. I cannot thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State enough for his announcement today of the significant increase in the hill livestock compensatory allowance for the current year.

The other place was right to highlight the importance of economic development. Scotland's scenic beauty is also its workshop, and we must not forget those who live there all the year round in favour of concentrating on the tourists. This will inevitably mean that we shall deal with planning in Committee—a complicated issue in itself. I may raise parochial matters about the River Esk and the River Liddel, which pass through my constituency and which, for some incongruous reason, are managed through England because the mouth is in England, although 90 per cent. of the rivers are in Scotland. I hope that it will be in order for me to table an amendment to reverse this impossible situation.

The Bill has been framed with first-class intentions. We must keep in our hands during our debates, if we are strong enough to hold it up, the large White Paper "This Common Inheritance", which sets out the Government's overall objectives for the next decade, and it was published in the autumn. Together with the Bill, it makes Scotland's

future look bright. Those of us who serve on the Committee will feel it a privilege to play a part in Scotland's future.

5.45 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I take exception to the title of the Bill. We are setting up not a natural heritage but an organisation to protect our natural heritage. That may be a grammatical point, but we should get things right in the first instance. The Bill is about conservation.

I regret that the Bill has no provision for national parks. A brief general enabling clause giving Scottish Natural Heritage permissive powers to make recommendations for national parks, subject to regulations, should be included in the Bill. This follows from the Countryside Commission report of December 1990 entitled "The mountain areas of Scotland". As the Secretary of State said, the report recommends the establishment of four national parks in Scotland—the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs area, Ben Nevis and Glencoe, and Black Mount and Wester Ross. England has seven national parks and Wales has three, all or which have done well over the past 40 years. Sadly, Scotland has no national parks, and after 40 years, it is time for us to catch up. The English and Welsh authorities refer to their national parks as jewels in their crowns, and the same would be true of any Scottish national park.

I know that the Government intend to seek world heritage listing for the Cairngorms and that a working party has been set up under Magnus Magnusson to advise the Secretary of State on the longer-term management of that area. In the other place, Lord Strathclyde said that it was not the Government's desire to pre-empt the possibility of the area becoming a national park. Those to whom I have spoken who have been associated in my area are suspicious about this move. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

The House of Lords did not debate the concept of national parks, but a major debate is developing in Scotland. Three of the four areas that the Countryside Commission for Scotland recommended should become national parks are much bigger and more remote than English national parks. However, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs area has more in common with the Lake district and Snowdonia. I realise that the debate on the national parks is not homogenous, so I shall make the case for the Loch Lomond area.

We need national parks because many more people come to the mountain areas. That certainly applies to the Loch Lomond area. We are only a stone's throw from Glasgow and many tourists come from there. It is a delicate area of outstanding beauty with wonderful landscapes and wildlife and recreational facilities, but sadly, we do not have the infrastructure and resources to cope with it. As long ago as 1945, the Government set up a committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Douglas Ramsay, to consider the establishment of national parks. The committee recommended that five national parks should be established in Scotland, including one at Loch Lomond. The case for the establishment of national parks in Scotland has thus been urged on Governments of all complexions for almost 50 years.

The pressures on the area that I represent in part are intense. For example, the pressure created by visitors is greater there than anywhere else in Scotland, while the facilities and services are largely inadequate or sub-standard. It is estimated that more than £100 million worth of development is under way, or at the planning stage. That must be recognised by the Government generally and by the Secretary of State for Scotland specifically. The uniqueness of Loch Lomond must also be recognised.

Fundamental changes are taking place in agricultural and forestry policies in the Loch Lomond area which could have far-reaching implications for local communities as well as for landscape, wildlife and recreational resources. We need a mechanism capable of focusing on such issues which is both comprehensive and co-ordinated and which would prepare and implement policies leading to the sound use and development of the area in the long term. At present, there is a fragmented approach. For example, four local authorities are involved in the planning and management of the present Loch Lomond regional park area, and there would be five such authorities under the proposed arrangement. Single interest agencies, such as those responsible for agriculture, forestry, tourism, wildlife and conservation, work within limited remits, although they are assuming increasingly overlapping responsibilities.

The authority responsible for regional parks attempts to adopt a comprehensive approach to the conservation and use of the Loch Lomond area, but its powers and resources are limited. Its ability to provide a lead in the co-ordination of policies is weak. For example, the authority is dependent on a minute of agreement which was entered into voluntarily by the four constituent authorities and could be disbanded at any moment.

There are minimum requirements if the area is to be adequately protected and if its recreational and economic potential sensibly realised in the local and national interests. First, there should be a clear statutory remit to guide planning and management policies which would recognise the need to realise recreational opportunities and to promote the economic and social interests of local communities while giving priority to conservation interests if significant conflicts arise between the desired objectives.

Secondly, there should be a statutorily based mechanism—a park authority—with responsibility for developing comprehensive planning and management policies for the conservation and recreational use of the area and to promote the interests of local communities. Clearly, local communities suffer if their considerations are not adequately taken into account.

Thirdly, there should be a statutory requirement that the majority of members of the managing authority be composed of locally elected representatives. The Secretary of State has said that he will devolve powers; let us therefore devolve powers in the most meaningful way by having elected representatives from the area so that the voice of the local community is heard and heeded and its wishes implemented. There is room, however, for the Secretary of State to reflect the national interest and to appoint members accordingly. That would ensure that a wide range of relevant experience, expertise and interest is represented on the authority.

There is no doubt that all that we are discussing requires money. If I remember rightly, the report of the Countryside Commission for Scotland estimated that the cost of four national parks would be £7·1 million, and that the Loch Lomond park would cost £2·1 million. The cost of the four parks would be well below the existing levels of

[Mr. John McFall]

grant that are made available to the English and Welsh national parks. It seems to me and to many others who have considered these matters that we are talking of quite a bargain.

Concern has been expressed about the different levels of support and warmth for the proposals before us. I realise that in some areas there is a divergence of view, but the principle of national park designation for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs has the strong support of the four constituent authorities which would be responsible for setting up the Loch Lomond park authority—Strathclyde and Central regional councils and Dumbarton and Stirling district councils. The two regional councils and the districts are ready to accept a national park. Dumbarton district council strongly supports the principle of delegation but has expressed reservations about the transfer of local planning powers to a new national park authority. The great issue has been resolved, however, and I submit that there is widespread support in my constituency for a Loch Lomond national park. I shall be happy to provide the Secretary of State with more evidence and information on that support. The right hon. Gentleman was kind enough to say that he would welcome any information that I was able to give him.

The circumstances in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs area are different in many material respects from those which apply in the other national park areas—the Cairngorms, Ben Nevis and Wester Ross. It is to be hoped that decisions taken in those areas will not be permitted to frustrate the long-held ambitions to establish a national park in the area that I represent in part. There was a case for a national park in the area 50 years ago, and I do not think that that case has diminished over the years. The requirement for a mechanism with a specific remit to focus on and seek to resolve the problems and opportunities to be found in a special part of Scotland is far more urgent today than it was in 1945. The proposals of the Countryside Commission for Scotland for national park designation would satisfy that requirement.

The proposals of the Countryside Commission for Scotland are based on a thorough scientific and social study. The commission has identified the Scottish mountain areas which are not most urgently in need of protection. The urgency that protection be afforded to them is as great in the area that I represent in part as it is elsewhere. The chairman of the Loch Lomond park authority, Councillor Duncan Mills, has said:

"It is ironic—

in terms of funding—

"that the national parks in England and Wales attract 75 per cent. grant aid from central government funds for all approved expenditure, while our expected contribution . . . represents 30 per cent. of our commitments. I find this situation unsatisfactory knowing the quality of the landscape and the wild life resource of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and also the urgent need for sound management."

In a letter to the Secretary of State of 15 January, Councillor Mills reminded the right hon. Gentleman of the concern expressed by members of the park authority that the opportunity may be lost to take early action to establish a Loch Lomond and Trossachs national park if decisions are not taken now. He said:

"No doubt you will be aware of the longstanding desire by the local authorities concerned with Loch Lomond to see the area designated a National Park. The public consultation exercise which has followed publication of the Mountain Areas Report . . . has reflected wide support for a National Park . . . In these circumstances it would be particularly frustrating if the opportunity presented by the powers of the present Bill to provide enabling powers were lost."

Along with Councillor Mills and the other members of the Loch Lomond park authority, as well as the regional and district councils in the area, I hope that the Government will be prepared to support proposals to incorporate an enabling clause to give the area national park status in terms approved of and recommended by the Government.

5.58 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The public usually assume that debates on the Floor of the House are conducted to score political points—and most of us would confess to playing our part in giving that impression. However, it was obvious from at least the speech of the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) that important matters can be debated with sincerity and with a cross-party flow. The speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and of the hon. Member for Dumbarton showed also their concern for, and knowledge of, what is happening in their constituencies, and an awareness of their constituents' preferences.

My qualifications for speaking in this debate may seem obtuse, but I am part Scot, and if it were suggested that I was just an English Member of Parliament wanting to participate in the debate, my relatives in Paisley would be deeply upset and would no doubt take out their displeasure on their two Labour Members of Parliament. I am not sure of the relationship, but I know that my grandmother was a good friend of Will Crooks—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] Luckily, she did not share his politics. It appears that some Opposition Members have never heard either of Will Crooks, but no doubt they have never heard of other Labour leaders in times past.

Mr. McKelvey: I am much interested in the hon. Gentleman's Scottish connections—so much so, that I will drop him a note asking if he is prepared to sit on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Nothing would give me greater pleasure, and I would normally look forward to doing so. Unfortunately, as a Parliamentary Private Secretary for another Department, I am forbidden to accept such an invitation. I hope that my Whip, the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker), will have noted that comment, in case I am not a PPS much longer.

The Government are to be congratulated on producing the Bill at such speed, following the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, because it is only right that things should be put right for Scotland. The only political comment that I want to make concerns Labour's attitude. There is some confusion as to whether or not Labour supports the Bill. From the speeches of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), it seemed that the Opposition opposed the Bill. I am glad that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) broadly supported it today, and I will be pleased if he reflects Labour party policy.

Mr. Wilson: To which of my speeches was the hon. Gentleman referring?

Mr. Hughes: My brief did not tell me which, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman with that information. I understand that he spoke in terms that opposed the new body and the Countryside Commission for Scotland. Certainly, many people are of the opinion that he takes that view.

Mr. Wilson: Only the idiot who wrote the hon. Gentleman's brief.

Mr. Hughes: The last time that the hon. Gentleman made such a comment was when I criticised Glasgow city council in this Chamber. He went storming out afterwards, no doubt to check whether my remarks were untrue—only to discover that they were not. I presume that that was true, because the hon. Gentleman never came back to me on that point, and nor did anyone from Glasgow city council. As my remarks would have been highly actionable outside this Chamber had they been untrue, I have no doubt that I would have heard again from the hon. Gentleman or from the city council if my remarks had been inaccurate. Nevertheless, if I have misrepresented the hon. Gentleman on this occasion, I apologise—and no doubt he will take the opportunity to correct me.

Mr. Wilson: I ask the hon. Gentleman to contemplate the possibility that no one responded to his remarks because no one is in the least interested in what he has to say about Glasgow city council, the Bill, or anything else.

Mr. Hughes: That is the kind of remark that has made the hon. Gentleman less beloved of right hon. and hon. Members of both sides of the House than might be justified by the talent that he normally displays. The hon. Gentleman is quick to make such remarks, but right hon. and hon. Members know that he does not usually mean what he says, so we are prepared to tolerate such remarks.

The question of devolved management was one of great concern in another place. On Second Reading and in Committee, their Lordships recounted personal experiences of how a lack of understanding of local conditions had created severe difficulties in the aftermath of the designation of sites of special scientific interest. They expressed the hope that Scottish Natural Heritage would operate with greater regard for local needs. That point was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries.

The English example that I want to cite in that respect is Peak national park in Derbyshire. In theory, local people are appointed to its board by Derbyshire county council, but in practice, none of them comes from the area that the park covers. Those members are appointed by a political party whose representation comes from outside the park's area. Therefore, the theory of local representation is not implemented in practice.

I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland winds up, he will give an assurance that local representation will mean just that in the case of Scottish Natural Heritage. I appreciate that a political party will want its political friends to fill the posts that are in its gift, but it is not good enough for all such offices to be filled only for political reasons, by people who live outside the area concerned.

What are the arguments for having only one body in future? One reason is that the lines of responsibility have become tangled, and the respective roles of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and of the Countryside Commission for Scotland were becoming unclear. I refer, for example, to the roles of different Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment takes no decisions in respect of Scotland. He acts only for England in respect of the environment, housing, local government, water, and other matters. In Scotland, they fall to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and to the Scottish Office.

The Nature Conservancy Council has functions in England, Scotland and Wales, but is sponsored by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, to which it reports. When controversial or difficult issues have arisen in Scotland, that paradox in respect of responsibilities made matters worse. Also, conservation matters often need to be discussed with local people and be handled with great sensitivity. I hope that both will be done with the formation of Scottish Natural Heritage.

I refer also to the conflict between access to the countryside and the need to protect it—to which the hon. Member for Garscadden also drew attention. It is not being unfair to point up two differences between the two bodies that are to be merged. Whereas the Countryside Commission for Scotland has, like its English counterpart, favoured access, the Nature Conservancy Council in Scotland has tried to restrict it. That conflict must be resolved, and I hope that SNH will be successful in that.

There are high hopes that the new agency will enjoy the best of both worlds. Because it will be an independent and non-departmental public body, it will be able to offer impartial advice to the Government, and to work closely with scientists, conservation experts, local communities, landowners, and farmers. SNH will also liaise with the business community, to promote the renewal of rundown and damaged areas. The expertise and experience of the two bodies will enhance and complement each other, to provide a more comprehensive approach to managing Scotland's natural heritage.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) said at a news conference to launch the proposed new body:

"its watchwords will be partnership, positive action, decentralised decision making and sound management advice."

I hope that that will be precisely how it turns out in practice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries referred to caravans, but he did not do so in a manner which I would endorse. He said that caravan sites are ugly. Of course some sites are, but that is not always the case. There is a tendency to overlook the needs of caravanners and the good work done by the Caravan Club. I speak as a member of the council of the Caravan Club—a non-paid position. I was honoured that the executive committee of the club asked me to become one of the nominated members of the council, to supplement the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oates), who has been a member of the council of the Caravan Club for some years. Indeed, he has hosted a number of events for them here in the House, which have been attended by Members from both sides of the House.

The Caravan Club would have preferred the Countryside Commission to carry on as it was, because it has had a good relationship with the Countryside Commission for Scotland and believes that the work that

[Mr. Hughes]

it has done in collaboration with the Commission has enabled it to improve the environment, as I hope I shall be able to demonstrate.

The Caravan Club believes that the Nature Conservancy Council represents the other side of the coin—the wrong-headed thinking that, if one stops people going into the countryside to enjoy it, one is somehow protecting it. I do not believe that that is the case. My hope and that of the Caravan Club is that that view about keeping people out of the countryside will not hold sway with Scottish Natural Heritage, but that the views held by the Countryside Commission for Scotland will.

Of some 278,000 members of the Caravan Club, about 16,000 live in Scotland, and 23 out of its 181 sites are in Scotland. During 1991, three more sites will open in Scotland. In addition, there are 4,000 certificated locations—small sites for five caravans or less—of which 279 are in Scotland.

In 1990 161,949 outfit nights—car, caravan and passengers—were spent on club sites in Scotland. In addition, the Caravan Club has seven centres in Scotland which run weekend and holiday rallies throughout the year at locations additional to sites and certificated locations.

The Caravan Club makes ample use of its ability to enjoy beautiful Scottish scenery, and in doing so is governed by a code of conduct which ensures respect for the environment and the landscape. The Caravan Club does not wish the freedom to enjoy the countryside to be limited by restrictions imposed by the new Scottish heritage body.

In recent years, much has been said and written about land reclamation. The Caravan Club has been active in that area since the early days, before it became fashionable. The club has used leading landscape architects and has transformed old railway stations, ex-military esatablishments, worked-out quarries and even old rubbish tips into lovely havens, bringing joy to those who use them and economic benefit to the locality.

Into that category fall 24 sites which are in the club's ownership or management. The National Trust and the Forestry Commission are also involved in site development with the club, by providing land for the purpose. Eight Caravan Club sites have been developed on land leased to it by the National Trust, and five sites have been created on land leased to the club by the Forestry Commission.

A number of awards have been made to the Caravan Club for the quality of the sites that it has created. Many thousands of trees have been planted by the club, not merely to shield caravans from people and to ensure they are not an eyesore, but because it believes that planting trees beautifies the countryside; it is important that we recognise that.

There is more scope for such work by the club, and I hope that the new body will consider that it is part of its role to liaise with the Caravan Club and other organisations and thus ensure that it uses them to help beautify the countryside. The kernel of the Caravan Club's concern is that there has been an increase in the activity of pressure groups which seek to influence international, national and local authorities towards greater protection.

The CPRE, in a recent pamphlet, said:

"In the 21st century the environment—globally, nationally and locally—will occupy an increasingly prominent place in the public and political mind. The Council . . . one of the most respected and long-established environmental organisations in the country, intends to remain at the forefront of those working to safeguard our countryside and secure a sustainable future for the wider environment."

That is of great importance to the caravaning fraternity. People in the club are aware of the situation and their need to react to it if they are to preserve our essential freedom to roam the countryside. As regards the CPRE's agenda——

Mr. Andrew Welsh *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way in a moment.

The club does not wish to suffer from a radical change of practice.

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the CPRE. Will he tell us what that is, and what relevance it has to Scotland or to the Bill?

Mr. Hughes: It is the Council for the Protection of Rural England, but I am making the point that its policies are the same as those that some people are urging on this new body. I am speaking on behalf of caravanners, whether they are from Scotland or any other part of the United Kingdom and trying to point out that there are always those who seek to limit the freedom of people with caravans to enjoy the holiday or sport of their choice. Therefore, it is relevant to the debate, although I accept that the CPRE is English.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Is the hon. Gentleman also speaking on behalf of travelling people, who use caravans quite a lot?

Mr. Hughes: I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) will seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker and will want to speak about that issue. Members of the Caravan Club believe that they have a much more responsible attitude to the localities in which they stop than the people that the hon. Gentleman is talking about. Indeed, I had a conversation the other night with one of the hon. Friends of the hon. Member for Dundee, East, who spoke in the most picturesque and colourful terms about such people—terms that some people would call racist, but that will be a matter for them.

Caravan Club members have been environmentally conscious since before it became the vogue. All members of the club sign the caravan, country and coastline codes which state:

"sites sustain a pleasant natural environment . . . remain unspoiled and capable of reverting to their original purpose."

Therefore, it is important that Scottish Natural Heritage takes fully into account the Caravan Club's responsible attitude towards caravan sites, and does not merely take the attitude that it does not want to encourage it in its area.

I urge Scottish Natural Heritage to consider one example. In Holland, on drained land in polders, I saw new forests, country areas and caravan and camping sites, which exist together in a way that can be more easily planned when one is creating land from scratch. I hope, however, that—especially when the central Scotland woodlands initiative goes ahead, as I trust that it will—bodies concerned with sport and recreation, including the Caravan Club, will be consulted.

Let me sum up—I am sure that that will please Opposition Members. I think it important to achieve a balance between the need for access to the countryside and the need to protect it, and also to ensure that any

development undertaken is sustainable and in tune with the wider needs of conservation. I have every confidence in that possibility, and I very much hope that Scottish Natural Heritage will consider it part of its business.

6.20 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Few people will remember that in my maiden speech I called for the setting up of a separate Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland, although I think that the Minister remembers. I welcome the Bill because I consider it eminently sensible to merge the Countryside Commission and the NCC in Scotland. I, too, pay tribute to the dedicated work of both bodies, but we must not gloss over the reality: one of the many factors that prompted me to call for a separate NCC was the unfortunate truth that in many areas of Scotland the organisation had got off on the wrong foot. That was sad, because its aims were ambitious and commendable, but it became increasingly obvious that something was very wrong and, in particular, that farmers and crofters deeply resented being told what to do and what not to do by what appeared to be an alien body.

Over the years, I have been inundated with complaints from people who have been sent letters by the NCC. I mention that partly to explain some of my later remarks to Labour Members. The complaints have related not only to the letters themselves, but to the designation of thousands of acres—often apparently far in excess of what was required to protect a weed growing in the bottom of a loch.

The letters from the NCC took the form of instructions or demands. They were often accompanied by a list of 27 operations that were

"likely to damage the special interest".

Most frightening of all to many people was the final, peremptory sentence, which read:

"As this notification may restrict the way you wish to use this land you are advised to consult a solicitor."

Not many crofters, for example, could afford to consult a solicitor. I am grateful to the Minister, who told me in 1988 that he would ask his officials to suggest to the NCC that it consider an improved form of words. I do not know whether that was done, but I take heart from what Magnus Magnusson said in his letter of 18 January to Lord Strathclyde:

"we shall be considering whether to alter the use of the words 'Potentially Damaging Operations'".

I think that the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) mentioned that.

Not a word has been said about the name of the new agency, although it was debated at some length in the other place. While I hesitate to disagree with Lord Grimond about his preferred alternatives—like him, I wonder whether "Scottish Natural Heritage" is the right title; I cannot think of a better alternative, but many people already call it "Scottish National Heritage"—I am glad that his suggestion, "Scottish Nature Conservancy", was not adopted. We should, I think, avoid a name that has provoked such strong emotions in the past.

It may surprise some that I do not favour a Gaelic name. I am well aware that "Scottish Natural Heritage" applies to the whole of Scotland, not just the highlands; that, however, does not rule out the possibility of a Gaelic title for the regional board that will represent the highland area.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Lady is speaking for her party. She has dealt in some detail with sites of special scientific interest; I assume that she intends to explain her party's attitude to clause 11.

Mrs. Michie: Yes. In fact, I have not yet dealt with SSSIs, but I intend to do so later.

We in Scotland care about the environment—not just in our country, but throughout the world—and we want to co-operate and share responsibility for the natural world far into the future. There seems to be a widely held misconception that it is impossible to be both a farmer and an environmentalist. I received a letter from a local farmer who was deeply distressed by such an implication. He described the way in which his family had been

"custodians of this little piece of earth for generations",

and explained:

"anybody farming in Argyll has to have an affinity with nature—there is little financial reward!".

He was right, of course: for many people the reward is not financial, but consists in the very act of working the land.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The farmers in my constituency who care about conservation—as many do—have put up signs saying, "Farmers Do Care".

Mrs. Michie: I am sure that that will contribute to a greater understanding of the position.

We should not doubt that Scottish Natural Heritage faces a monumental task. So many different interests and organisations are concerning themselves with the Scottish countryside. To meet the legitimate interests of those organisations, SNH will have to have the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job. I have already commended the former Secretary of State on his perspicacity in choosing as chairman someone of Magnus Magnusson's stature; I am sure that, like all of us, he has received representations from many different organisations.

Let me spend a few moments on the aspects of the Bill which concern us most. There has been considerable debate about SSSIs, for instance. Whatever the merits or otherwise of a review of the existing designations—I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that clause 11 is unworkable in its present form—I believe that an appeal procedure must be included in the Bill. It is undemocratic for a Government body to be powerful enough to influence people's lives radically—let no one doubt that it can—when there is no effective or meaningful right of appeal. In the eyes of those affected, the Nature Conservancy Council is both judge and jury. Account must be taken both of the scientific merits of notification and of the economic and social impact on the individual or community.

Magnus Magnusson's letter to Lord Strathclyde makes a statement of good intent and argues that there is no need for a statutory appeals procedure. There were, no doubt, good intentions during the proceedings on the Bill that became the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. However, there were, and are, enormous problems over implementing that Act. Why not make "good intent" part of this legislation? What is there to be afraid of?

Mr. Wilson: I am a little confused about the position adopted by the hon. Lady's party. We hear now that the amendment in the other place, which was vigorously supported by Liberal Democrat peers, particularly from the Highlands, is not supported by the Liberal Democrats

[Mr. Wilson]

in this House. The hon. Lady made a case for an appeals system. It is hardly encouraging that members of her party in another place voted for a device to wreck the Bill rather than for an appeals system.

Mrs. Michie: I regard it not as a wrecking procedure but, as the hon. Member for Dumfries and the Secretary of State spelt it out, as a clause whose intentions are not clear and which would be unworkable. However, the principle embodied in the clause is an appeals procedure, which I support. I have been asked to say a few words about the goose problem on Islay. There are far too many geese on that island. Barnacle and white-fronted geese are listed in annex 1 of the directive on the conservation of wild birds. The Wildlife and Countryside Act implements its provisions.

However, the geese pose an enormous problem and something must be done to manage the numbers, which now exceed 33,000. The sanctuary on that island is able to care for no more than 10,000 geese. That is a large number, but 23,000 additional and uninvited guests for dinner create a serious problem. Goose scaring has not worked. Something, therefore, must be done. In the meantime, farmers and crofters who are losing their best grass and livelihoods should be paid compensation.

Sir Hector Monro: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. I hope that she will bear in mind the approach adopted by Sir Arthur Duncan. The chairman of the Nature Conservancy before it became the Nature Conservancy Council. When Brent geese were placed on the protected list, he said that, as soon as the numbers rose sufficiently, they would be taken off the list. Exactly the same procedure ought to be adopted with barnacle and white-fronted geese. Barnacle geese should be taken off the protected list for the sake of Islay and the Solway, where the numbers are also very large. Shooting geese does not have a huge impact on numbers. Something else, therefore, must be done to control numbers.

Mrs. Michie: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that the Minister heard what he said.

It is intended to establish a marine nature reserve in my constituency. Hon. Members may be familiar with the Loch Sween proposals. The Wildlife and Countryside Act made it a duty for the Nature Conservancy Council to establish marine nature reserves where that was considered to be environmentally necessary. Evaluation procedures were used. An initial list of seven marine nature reserve sites was drawn up, including Loch Sween. Only two have been established—one in the Bristol channel and the other in Wales. It seems that the Nature Conservancy Council has come up against the problem of finding suitable sites and then putting its proposals into effect. A large question mark therefore hangs over the perceivable benefits and the need for marine nature reserves.

The consultation document for Loch Sween refers to 12 proposals to regulate activities that are considered potentially to be environmentally damaging. Little reference is made to actual damage that is now taking place, which would necessitate the kind of controls that the NCC is proposing. The NCC does not appear to be convinced about its own arguments and evaluations. There has been overwhelming opposition to the proposal. I am sure that the chairman-designate, Magnus Magnusson, will not mind my saying that he has listened carefully to what has been said by those who oppose the proposals.

The principles involved are consultation and discussion, the right of appeal and democracy. Those principles apply to the people of Loch Sween just as they apply to people who live in areas that may or may not be designated national parks. I am not convinced about their value. However, I concede that Loch Lomond is perhaps a special case. I was born and brought up on the banks of that beautiful loch. Even then, I was aware of the pressures. Local authorities with responsibilities for the area want it to be designated as a national park. I am willing, therefore, to listen to their arguments. Earlier, the Secretary of State referred to integration and the need for a better tone. I hope that the new agency will encourage such a development.

The hon. Member for Dumfries referred to the island of Rhum as the jewel in the crown. We cannot and must not divorce people from the need to conserve the beauty of the countryside. I refer particularly to the highlands and islands, although the whole of Scotland is of the greatest value to all its people. A nightmare scenario was painted 25 years ago: the powers-that-be wanted the highlands of Scotland to be turned into a recreational playground, with farming estates de-stocked and used exclusively for game sports. There would have been hundreds of holiday chalet developments; crofts would have been sold as holiday homes, some keeping a few goats. National parks with signposts, heritage centres and craft shops would have sprouted up all over the place, and we should have seen yachts in every inlet. The only people left would be those working in the tourist industry. That scenario appeared in many newspaper articles approximately 25 years ago.

Tourism is vital. However, I have repeatedly warned about putting all one's eggs in the tourist basket. At this precise moment we have clear evidence of how ephemeral tourism is, with rumours of war, real wars, terrorist attacks and bad weather. *[Laughter.]* Labour Members may laugh, but that is the case in rural areas of Scotland. People on the family farm, crofters and fishermen underpin the rural economy and are the essential custodians of the countryside. They currently face unprecedented bad times.

We must add to that the rural housing crisis, which still exists, despite the advent of Scottish Homes. Local people are priced out of the housing market because of the lack of good quality, low-cost affordable houses. Those are the people—not the developers, the absentee landlords or the land speculators—who have cared for and husbanded the areas that are worth designating as SSSIs. If we want such areas to be conserved, we shall have to pay for it. It is quite clear that reform of the agricultural policy, in whatever forum, must support farmers and crofters, to allow them to conserve the countryside, if they are not to be allowed to produce the same quantities of food as they have in the past.

Mr. Wilson: I agree with much of what the hon. Lady says, but how on earth does payment through local management agreements under SSSIs benefit the people who work and live on the land and who I strongly agree should benefit? How much of the £400,000 that was paid to Lord Thurso in the first of those infamous management agreements—to encourage him not to plant trees where he

never wanted to plant trees when there was not that £400,000—went to the people who live and work on the land and how much went to Lord Thurso?

Mrs. Michie: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I want money to go to the crofters and farmers whose land is not in a designated area and whose land is being ruined by geese—for example, on Islay.

Too often, Government policies do not complement each other. Instead, they seem to pull in opposite directions. For example, the Government recently made available a welcome sum of money to enable the extension of Gaelic television and broadcasting. They did that to support and develop the Gaelic language. That was very commendable, but if people are not there to continue to speak that language the Government would rightly be accused of wasting money. Where is the legislation giving people the same consideration as the corncrake, the pine marten or the rare orchid?

The hon. Member for Dumfries talked about the island of Rhum as the jewel in the conservancy crown. Great —we saw the return of the white-tailed sea eagle. Anybody who cares to go north sees miles and miles of empty land in the straths of Kildonan, where once there was laughter and, indeed, tears, but no one is creating the conditions in which people can return. People used to live on the island of Rhum. Now, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is full of deer, and that is a tragedy. People, conservation, beauty and the countryside are inextricably intertwined.

Every inch of Scotland is worth caring about—every lovely part of it, with its history, its traditions, its culture and its potential. The people's affinity with the land is demonstrated so often in the language—be it Scots or Gaelic—in poetry, song and music. We cannot have the one without the other. I look forward to the examination of the Bill in Committee.

6.45 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I apologise that I did not come to the House as early as I wished—there were problems. I hope that the House will understand.

I must declare an interest. The Countryside Commission has its headquarters in Battleby in my constituency. Also, I advise the British Holiday and Home Parks Association.

Those of us who care about our beautiful rural Scotland, in particular beautiful rural highland Scotland, recognise that conservation is about balancing the needs and the wishes of those who live there and must make a living out of the circumstances in which they find themselves. Balance is required also so that the natural development of the species that are endemic to the area are not put at risk. Probably more important in modern times is that balance in conservation is about the use of the countryside and the people who wish to use it for leisure and recreation.

That is particularly pertinent at the moment, because thousands of people have spent the weekend skiing at Glen Shee in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is always very welcome in my constituency, with or without his skis. Some still argue that skiing is an infringement or impingement upon their use of the countryside. There can be no better example of that point than some of the debates that we have had in my constituency about the impact of skiing.

The NCC became involved in what can only be described as lengthy, acrimonious correspondence with the chairlift company at Glen Shee. I am pleased to say that the matter has been resolved, with the NCC admitting that it was wrong. I agree with the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) that delicacy is required when handling the powers that Parliament gives statutory bodies. I agree that the wording that was sent to the people in the countryside was indelicate, to say the least. Those of us who were involved with the problems concerning the chairlift company felt horror that a body that was established by an Act of Parliament and has statutory rights to lay down certain conditions could have been so insensitive, particularly when, after the protracted correspondence, it had to admit that it was wrong.

One clause that is causing much interest and concern is clause 11. My position is unambiguous. A statutory appeals procedure must be laid down. I shall make that clear in Committee—I am bound to be chosen to serve on the Committee. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I do not sit silently in Committee. When I feel strongly about something, I shall speak about it.

I shall certainly say that I accept that clause 11 as it is drafted could cause problems. That is not to say that it could not be amended satisfactorily to meet the hopes, aspirations and wishes of both those who represent the conservation platform and those affected by conservation measures—the people whose livelihood, land and interests may well be affected.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that that is one of the crucial issues in the Bill. It has already been raised by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). Could the hon. Gentleman help us, even at this stage, by telling us about the appeals procedure? On what basis would the appeal be made—scientific, sociological or economic? At what stage in the procedure would it be made?

Mr. Walker: I do not intend to go into the detail today. This is not the time to do so. I promise the hon. Gentleman that I shall table amendments and speak to them in Committee. Certainly I shall not be satisfied if the Bill emerges from Committee without a proper appeals procedure which is recognised as just that.

I have in my hand a letter from the Scottish Wildlife Trust, which I imagine every Scottish Member has received. The third paragraph says:

"We consider that the system of SSSIs is a fundamental and essential element of successful nature conservation in Great Britain. Sites are designated as being 'of Special Scientific Interest' by the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) using scientific criteria which they have developed to ensure that the most valuable examples of Britain's biological and geological heritage are recognised as such and receive appropriate protection".

I do not argue with that, but if the NCC can produce the evidence, the appeals procedure will show whether the evidence bears close examination.

I have always been cautious about giving statutory bodies powers which allow them to claim that they are the experts. I remind the House of the battle that I had with the experts of the Civil Aviation Authority over six years. I draw the attention of the House to the matter purely to illustrate the principle, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The CAA experts said that they were the only people who knew where an airway should be. That airway happened to impinge on gliding, an activity in which I have

[Mr. Walker]

an interest. I and almost everyone else who involved in leisure and recreation aviation and military aviation judged, first, that the airway was not required, and secondly, that it was in the wrong place. It took me six years to have it moved, but I succeeded in doing so, because the experts were wrong. We must always keep in mind when passing legislation the possibility that the experts are wrong. As I said, I support the paragraph which I read out, but if the scientific criteria are so good, the NCC will not have any difficulty with an appeals procedure.

I have declared one interest. Another matter in which I have a considerable interest is caravanning. I have spent much of my adult life caravanning. I began as a young man, because it was the only way in which I could afford to take my young children off on the type of holiday they thought they should have. We grew to love caravanning. It has a particular appeal because of the freedom it gives.

Anyone who began caravanning 40 years ago, as I did, and has compared it with caravanning today will recognise and acknowledge the tremendous improvements that have taken place in caravan sites and parks throughout the United Kingdom and Europe, and certainly in north America and Australia, where I have camped in caravans. Many of the improvements have been brought about by the demands of the customers and the commercial pressures applied by them.

The people who live in the countryside—the landowners, farmers, crofters and those who are involved in supplying leisure and recreational facilities—have an interest in maintaining the quality of their environment. They do not wish to destroy it, because if they did so no one would visit it. It is as simple as that. They have a vested interest in maintaining the quality and value of the environment, whether for skiing, sailing or any of the other many lovely recreational activities of which we have an abundance in Scotland.

We should recognise that one thing that we have in substantial quantity in Scotland is land. We still have huge areas of what could best be described as wilderness. There are advantages in developing the wilderness into recreational areas. There are those who argue that we should leave the wilderness as it is, but on that basis we would not have a chairlift in Glen Shee or the lovely sailing facilities which we have on so many of our lochs. We would not have walks and hill climbs and all the other facilities, such as hang gliding, which did not exist a few years ago.

Yet all those facilities provide opportunities for the leisure and recreational use of the countryside. When one is putting on the statute book legislation which deals with conservation, I repeat that there must be a balance. Conservation does not mean leaving things as they were from the beginning of time. That could well mean that we should be legislating to do nothing. At the end of the day, we would restrict various activities.

I often think of the facilities which were provided in my constituency by the Victorians. They planted trees so that pheasants could be bred. Dry stone walls were built for obvious reasons—to maintain the livestock and keep them in. The walls were put there not by God but by man. If man is required to change things which man has put there, there must be a logical debate about it and a balance. We cannot simply fossilise things as they are now. We must recognise and acknowledge that change is not necessarily all bad, any more than it is necessarily all good.

No one argues that merging the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland is not a good step. We may debate some of the detail but we welcome it. I wish to put in a bid for the new headquarters to be located at Battleby, in my constituency, where the facilities are superb. I see that my hon. Friend the Minister is not listening. There cannot be better facilities anywhere. I hope that the new body will be established at Battleby. The new body can be assured of the support of the local Member of Parliament. Indeed, it will have the support of two local Members.

The powers in the Bill to allow the abstraction of water for irrigation purposes and to control it under a simplified procedure are long overdue. Often, an area suffering from drought is almost cheek by jowl with another suffering from floods, so there must be something wrong with mankind's management of the environmental processes. Therefore, I welcome the measure.

I also welcome the powers to bring the water authorities' handling of deficiencies in supply in times of drought into line with that for England and Wales. I am fortunate to live in an area where the bulk of domestic and commercial water comes from splendid reservoirs built before the second world war. Those reservoirs supply the bulk of the needs of Tayside, and we are grateful that that is so. Other parts of Scotland are not so well provided for, and we must recognise that.

On 20 July 1990, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), when launching the proposals for Scottish Natural Heritage in Edinburgh, said:

"its watchwords will be partnership, positive action, decentalised decision making and sound management advice."

I hope that, when we have finished with the Bill, it will lead to just that. As hon. Members have pointed out, there were problems with the early proposals, and it would be unwise not to recognise that.

The new agency's aims will be to achieve a balance between the need for access to the countryside and the need to protect it. We must look carefully at planning, particularly for housing. I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State at the weekend about rural housing. I hope that Scottish Homes, which has been looking into this matter, will bear in mind the need for low-cost housing to be developed in rural areas. We do not want to prevent people, whoever they may be, from coming. We want everyone to come, and we welcome them. We must ensure that, if someone can afford an inflated price for a property, the local community and its children who want to work and live there should not lose the opportunity to have a home. Certainly in Aberfeldy, there is plenty of work, but not nearly enough houses. We can look into that.

The new body must play a major role in determining policies on land use and land management. What matters is the use of land and how it is managed, not who owns it. I do not care if the laird from the Labour party owns a substantial part of Scotland. It worries me not, because this particular laird is a good land user and manages it effectively. It does not matter who he is, where he is or what his background is. We must not include in the Bill doctrinaire impediments to the use or management of

land. In my experience, it is dangerous to theorise too much about matters which are better dealt with by practical people.

We must ensure that the development that takes place is sustainable; we should not get involved in any development that is not. The development must also be in tune with the wider needs of conservation. Some hon. Members may think from what I have said so far that I am not keen on conservation. I am, but I am even keener on ensuring that my constituents do not have their livelihoods and futures put at risk because some individuals believe that they know best how land should be used.

There will be a great deal of agreement across the Committee on that. Plenty of Members who represent rural constituencies will probably serve on the Committee, which is no bad thing. Just as I recognise that I may not be the best person to talk about the needs of an inner-city area, so I sometimes think that I listen to people who do not know much about the needs of the more remote parts of my constituency.

The Government's record on spending money on environmental services is good. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) said that money was being given to one of Scotland's better known lairds. I do not care if money goes to lairds, provided that it is used effectively. It is not who is getting money, but the use to which money is put which matters. The Government's recent spending on conservation and water schemes has been commendable. That is not to say that future demands will not be still greater. There will always be a need to improve water services.

I mentioned an SSSI which affects my constituency. There are different pressures and demands in my constituency. For example, there is the need to extract barytes, which are the essential mineral for drilling oil in the North sea. We are fortunate in north Tayside in having huge deposits of the mineral. I say "fortunate", because it is good for the United Kingdom's economy that it happens to be strategically placed and relatively close to the oil drilling in the North sea.

On the other hand, that extraction creates problems locally. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be aware of my long-standing interest in this. Huge articulated vehicles, loaded up with logs and barytes, undoubtedly cause problems on our narrow country roads. We must look carefully at the impact that that has on the local community, as well as the economic needs of the nation. Attitudes to major roads, for example the A9, need to be substantially changed in the light of the extraction of barytes and the carriage of timber, so that my constituents and I are satisfied, the needs of economic activity in the North sea are met and the views of Her Majesty's Government are accommodated.

I welcome the farm woodland proposals. They have gone well, certainly in my constituency. I am not opposed to tree planting. I find it disturbing when trees are planted without consideration of the needs of the local area, such as natural views. As a large part of my constituency was covered by the Caledonian forest, if it was as it used to be, it would be largely trees. When conservationists come to me, as they do, I ask them what period of the land's history they wish to conserve. It is important that conservationists should tell us that.

We must balance the needs and economic demands of today with opportunities for people who live in the country to make a viable living, with opportunities for those who wish to use it for leisure and recreational purposes. My earlier comments will show that I am fully in favour of that. The new body will have huge responsibilities and will have to balance all those conflicting demands.

In Committee, I hope that those of us who represent rural constituencies and who are constantly trying to balance the demands and pressures will be listened to and that our views will be those that emerge from the Committee.

7.9 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I shall begin by correcting the false impression that may have been given by the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). He suggested that the Labour party was opposed to the principle of devolution in environmental matters. Clearly, that is not so. If it were, we should be opposing the Bill, but we are not. The hon. Gentleman referred to our position last year on the Environmental Protection Bill. I served on the Committee considering that Bill and during its passage we made it clear that we did not oppose devolution of the Nature Conservancy Council. However, we were concerned that any future body set up to cover Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom should properly take into account its wider responsibilities in the European Community. That was our emphasis throughout the passage of the Bill and our concern was shared by many other bodies and groups.

The new agency will not relate only to the United Kingdom or to the wider environmental picture in Europe but downwards, so to speak, to the local communities and regions of Scotland. It is natural that much of today's debate has concentrated on the set of relationships which the new agency must develop with local communities on whose lifestyles and means of earning a living, the agency's decisions will have a profound effect. It is natural that many of the comments of hon. Members of all parties have focused on that set of relationships.

There has been much discussion about the fate of clause 11, the existence of SSSIs, the reaction that they have caused in local communities, especially over the past decade, and the Government's proposal for a new designation, which they referred to as a natural heritage area. This is not a simple issue. It can be argued that clause 11 is a wrecking clause and must therefore be removed. It would be a mistake, however, to think that everyone who voted for clause 11 in another place or that everyone here who has sought to find some merit in the principles that they perceive to be behind it approaches it with the same point of view.

Some of those in another place wished to wreck the Bill. Others wished merely to retain their private landowning interests, privileges and powers without having those powers intruded upon in any way by the wider public interest. Others—I include the Liberal Democrats—expressed reservations about the SSSIs and the way in which the NCC has designated them. Many people have genuine concerns which are echoed throughout the highlands and islands and, certainly, in my constituency.

Although clause 11 must be removed, because the idea of a complete review of SSSIs is absurd and unworkable —especially within a specific time scale—we need to reconsider the role of SSSIs in conservation in Scotland. I hope that the new agency will do that. There is a need to

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

review the use and designation of SSSIs. I hope that my use of the word "review" is not taken to suggest that I am in favour of clause 11; I am not.

It has been said that there are about 1,300 SSSIs. One must wonder whether the designation and selection of specific sites in such profusion is the correct way in which to approach conservation in Scotland. I argue not that SSSIs are too stringent or strict in their application but that they may be too narrow or restricted.

In 1984 the NCC issued a statement entitled "Nature Conservation in Great Britain". It said that the value of conservation was not just scientific but educational, recreational, aesthetic and inspirational. I fear that concentrating purely on countless hundreds of SSIs has led even the NCC to neglect all those other elements. It has focused too narrowly on the scientific side of conservation and neglected the educational, recreational, aesthetic and inspirational aspects which it had said were equally important.

We must reconsider the role of SSSIs, not according to a timetable or to wreck the Bill, and certainly not to placate landowning interests, but to discover whether they are the best way to advance conservation in Scotland. To some extent, the very name "SSSI" is undesirable. One of the merits of the Bill, as claimed by the Government and supported by the Liberal Democrats' spokesperson, is that we could start with a clean slate—that it would be a good idea to start with a new name for the agency. It might be a good idea to start with a new name for SSSIs.

I fear that the name is guaranteed to alienate the ordinary public, especially those who live in the local community. They naturally dislike the image conjured up of their culture, society and villages being put under the microscope of a white-coated scientist. It would be appropriate to take the opportunity offered by this fresh start to consider renaming SSSIs "natural heritage sites" to fit in with natural heritage areas about which the Government have been talking. That term would perhaps carry wider connotations than the SSSIs previously focused upon.

We must find a name that will begin to embrace a wider philosophy of conservation—a name that will not focus simply on the scientific value of preserving the sites, but will take into account various other elements, which, in the context of Scotland's natural heritage, are of equal importance. The agency could usefully undertake that job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said that there seems to be a growth of overlapping designations concerning conservation in Scotland. The agency might usefully look at the whole spread of designations with a view to rationalising or co-ordinating them. For example, they might be strengthened for the national scenic areas and expanded for environmentally sensitive areas. Indeed, environmentally sensitive areas were not mentioned by my hon. Friend. As the Minister will acknowledge, those areas are handled by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. None the less, they obviously impinge on environmental matters. The very fact that environmentally sensitive areas come under another department shows how complex and baroque the system of environmental designation has become.

I hope that, in reviewing the current set of designations and the purely scientific focus of SSSIs, the agency will begin to develop a strategy that sees conservation not just as relating to designated sites—little islands of natural purity, almost cut off from the rest of the rural world—but as an integral part of the approach to the discharge of our responsibilities for the entire Scottish countryside. Our understanding of conservation and of heritage must become deeper and wider. We must develop a heritage philosophy that embraces not just natural heritage but language, such as Gaelic, the music and culture of the highlands and islands, and so on.

My second point relates to another matter that has come up in this debate—the use of the phrase "sustainable development". There is a lack of clarity about the meaning of "sustainable development". It is not clear how it might be applied in the Scottish countryside. I hope that, however the Government eventually define the phrase, it will not be mere tokenism. I hope that the concept will not be used just to embrace the individual SSSIs, nature reserves and scenic areas that the new agency inherits. I hope that the philosophy of sustainable development will signal a new attitude towards the whole of our natural heritage throughout rural Scotland.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have spoken of the difficulty of balancing conservation with other interests—development and leisure. Skiing and caravanning have been mentioned. Clause 3 makes provision for the new agency to take into account the needs of those involved in agriculture, fishing and so on. To my mind, instead of trying to balance development and conservation, we should try to find ways of integrating the two, so that they might work hand in hand to a greater extent. We need a serious and concentrated effort to address current practices in agriculture, crofting, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture—all with the aim of achieving sustainable development. The case should be obvious to anyone who has looked at what has happened in the fisheries industry in recent years. The crisis in the industry is due precisely to the failure to apply a philosophy of sustainable development in that area of economic activity. There will be a revival of the fisheries only when development and conservation are seen to be working hand in hand.

The same is true of every other economic activity undertaken in rural areas—whether in fishing, aquaculture, tourism, oil, or in the mineral extraction in the Minches off the west coast of Scotland which is envisaged in the very near future. Before even embarking on the development of any of these economic activities, we must try to match them with the philosophy of sustainable development. That is a huge and absolutely critical task that must be undertaken if we are genuinely to move away from the narrow, scientifically focused approach to conservation that has been adopted in recent years.

A new agency, almost, is needed to carry out the task. Indeed, in a paper submitted to the Scottish Office by the World Wide Fund for Nature, Simon Pepper recommends setting up a new rural resources commission, which would try to undertake the task of integrating conservation and development in Scottish rural areas. So far as I know, the Government have not responded to that submission. I doubt whether there is much prospect of our getting such a new commission, but I hope that, if we cannot have a new agency to carry out this central task, the new natural

heritage agency will set up a committee to examine the issue and to apply rigorously the approach of sustainable development throughout the Scottish countryside.

My final point follows naturally from the two previous ones. It is one that has been mentioned by several Conservative Members. Behind this entire debate is the land question. We cannot talk about sustainable development or about conservation without talking also about the use and abuse of Scotland's fundamental rural resource—land. When we talk about land, we must inevitably consider land ownership. All I want to do at this stage is to flag the issue as being still important and to make two specific proposals, which I hope will be pursued at the later stages of the Bill.

The first is that there should be an end to all secret management agreements between public agencies, including the new heritage agencies, and private landowning interests, regarding SSSIs, nature reserves or any other designated sites. The World Wide Fund for Nature has also said that the last publicly available management plan in respect of the Cairngorms nature reserve expired in 1969 and that, since then, there has been no public access to management agreements between the public agencies and the private landowning interests. That is absolutely intolerable and it should not be allowed to continue. That is a simple but worthwhile change that the Bill could be used to pursue.

My second specific suggestion is that all land sales and purchases over a minimum size in the highlands and islands should, in future, be subject to an environmental order and a review by the natural heritage agency before they are allowed to proceed. Conservative Members may not take to that suggestion initially, but I ask them to keep an open mind and to consider it as we deliberate the Bill —after all, the principle is not new. Industrial takeovers and purchases are monitored by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to ensure that they do not diminish competition in industry, but rather enhance it.

Therefore, why not monitor large transfers and takeovers of estate lands in the highlands and islands to assess whether they contribute to, or detract from, conservation and the enhancement of our natural heritage? Such a move would cost the taxpayer very little and would be worth while for the new agency, or a committee of the agency specifically set up for that purpose, to undertake. It would provide great gains to the public and the national interest, not least in helping to puncture some of the feverish and speculative activity in land sales in the Scottish highlands and islands.

Finally, a thread that has been running through the debate has been the issue of the new site for the headquarters of natural heritage agency. I have no interest in the matter—I am certainly not about to propose my constituency as a suitable site. However, I acknowledge the Minister's comments about the wish to devolve to the affected regions as much as possible of the administration of the agency's activities. I am sure that the Minister is already aware that the region of Scotland that will be by far the most affected by conservation groups and the new agency is the highlands and islands. Therefore, I strongly urge him to consider a site there. To my mind, the most appropriate place would be the fastest-growing town in Scotland in the past decade—Inverness. We must begin to devolve administrative structures to regional level. Let us not stop at devolution from Peterborough to Edinburgh, but continue it further and take it right into the highlands and islands.

7.32 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald). We had many happy moments in Standing Committee of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and, during that time, many of us were impressed by the hon. Gentleman's arguments, his logic and, above all, his common sense.

I particularly agree with the hon. Gentleman's remarks on SSSIs—or "triple SIs", as the hon. Gentleman calls them. There are roughly 1 million hectares designated as SSSIs which is about 10 per cent. of the total land surface. There has been considerable controversy over the designation of some of those SSSIs. I shall not repeat some of the examples given in another place by a number of our noble Friends who spoke on Second Reading, but there have obviously been examples in which SSSIs have been imposed with too little sensitivity, too hurriedly, and without enough consultation.

The Secretary of State said that he would consider the way in which SSSIs are implemented in the future, but did not say whether he would look at existing SSSIs and whether there was any possibility of reviewing their terms and conditions. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will deal with that matter when he winds up.

Although I support the Bill, many people will agree that it is long overdue. It is important to bring nature conservation down to a grass-roots level. It is only sad that we are not introducing a similar Bill for England. I support the idea of making such a logical move, which is apparently widely supported. Indeed, I have looked long and hard for people with arguments against it or ill words to say about it, and I have found very few.

I particularly approve of the approach taken by various local authorities, which recognise that they have a role to play under the new structure and appear to be looking forward to it. Certainly, the old system, whereby the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland delivered nature conservation from its headquarters in Peterborough—a location not far from my constituency, but very remote from the constituencies of many hon. Members, particularly Opposition Members—meant that it could not do a proper job. The idea of an integrated approach to bring together the two main organisations makes a lot of sense. I welcome the appointment of Magnus Magnusson as chairman. I hope that his appointment will be bolstered by the appointments of many other able council members. Will the Minister consider that?

Having read carefully some of the speeches made in another place, and having listened to much of the debate this evening, I am concerned about a document that has been published recently entitled "The Mountain Areas of Scotland," on conservation and management. The Secretary of State and the Shadow Secretary of State both mentioned that document, as did several hon. Members. It may be a worthy document in some respects, but I am worried about some of the statements in it, which appear to be pretty hostile to the farming community and the way in which it has managed its affairs over the years.

The document states:

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

"A sense of injury about land tenure continues in the Highlands today."

The document also suggests draconian new powers when it says:

"To manage land and co-ordinate other land-controlling organisations; to impose their management orders as a last resort; to purchase land, compulsorily where necessary; to introduce byelaws to control nuisances; and to enter into management agreement to secure access."

Mr. Wilson: I should like some clarification before we proceed further. The hon. Gentleman quotes the document as saying that a sense of injury persists in the highlands about land tenure today. Is he saying that that is an inaccurate statement of the position?

Mr. Bellingham: I did not say that the statement was inaccurate, but I do not like its tone. It implies that the farmers, crofters and landowners have not done their stuff in terms of managing the local environment. I believe that they have, and that there is no need for draconian powers.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the statement. I am sure that the sense of injury referred to derives not from the activities of farmers or crofters, but from those of people who are rather better known to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bellingham: We shall debate those matters further in Committee. The general tone of the document and the way in which it suggests a form of interventionism would not appeal to the Minister.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend should not pay too much attention to the comments of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), because he has a pathological hatred of landowners. I speak on behalf of the landowners in my constituency. They are good landowners, who practice good husbandry of the land and have good relations with the people who work for and with them.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful for that intervention. There is no doubt that the vast majority of Scottish landowners manage their estates with considerable ability and ingenuity. Furthermore, they look after the people who work for them and ensure that the rural economy is maintained better than it would be if they did not take such an approach.

Criticism is made in "The Mountain Areas of Scotland" of the way in which landowners have constructed tracks and roads across properties and have managed their forestry, red deer population and public access. I have been fortunate enough to spend much time holidaying and travelling around Scotland, particularly the Western Isles and the west coast of Scotland. I agree with those criticisms to some extent, but in the main they are not justified. The way in which the majority of farmers and landowners have managed the uplands compares favourably with the way in which the uplands of England have been managed.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The hon. Gentleman is saying, and few people will disagree with him, that the majority of landowners and estate owners are responsible and sensitive. Nevertheless, he must accept that a minority have built roads across the landscape, particularly in the Cairngorms, and absentee landlords have not entered into management agreements on sensitive and important habitats. Those people represent a small minority, but there must be power to deal with them. How can the hon. Gentleman criticise that?

Mr. Bellingham: I appreciate that it is a small minority, but the suggestion is a sledgehammer to crack a nut. The majority of wayward landowners who have abnegated their responsibilities are slowly being brought to heel, and many existing powers are being enhanced without the new suggested structure, which will be extremely bureaucratic.

The hon. Member for Garscadden spoke in detail about the problems facing the red deer population in Scotland. I am not an expert, but a possible way forward would be to repeal the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 to allow the reintroduction in the highlands of the wolf and wild boar. I know that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has been critical of the landed community, but if he is prepared to assist in repealing that Act, it would bring in much-needed extra revenue by increasing sporting activities, and every year an average of 10 lairds would be eaten. I am sure that he would go along with that.

We have problems with the suburban fox. One of the disadvantages of my scheme might be the emergence of the suburban wolf, or packs of them. The advantage is that it would inject new urgency into the Government's rough sleeping initiative, which many feel is long overdue.

The wild boar could easily be reintroduced in the highlands. Scottish Natural Heritage could make a priority of a study into the reintroduction of the wild boar —I see the hon. Member for Western Isles nodding—and the feasibility of reintroducing the wolf. The main reason why both animals have become extinct is the removal of natural forestry and woodland in Britain. Since 1919, there has been a considerable increase in afforestation north and south of the border. I do not see why those two animals could not be reintroduced into their natural environment, bringing back important revenue to upland areas and adding to the natural heritage.

Mr. Wilson: On an experimental basis, will the hon. Gentleman consider the reintroduction of the wolf to north-west Norfolk before its reintroduction to the highlands?

Mr. Bellingham: I must be fair to the hon. Gentleman. Norfolk is not a well-wooded area, and it is heavily populated. I can envisage some landowners in Norfolk welcoming the return of the wolf and wild boar. One landowner who farms not far from King's Lynn and who owns the biggest estate in my constituency—I cannot mention her name in the House—would welcome the return of the wild boar because it would add to the list of animals that can be hunted. However, the obvious place to make these reintroductions would be the highlands. I am pleased that it appears that I have the support of the hon. Member for Western Isles.

The farming and landowning community in Scotland has been criticised for insensitive afforestation, particularly of certain straths and glens, which has damaged the environment and river catchment areas. It is only fair to examine the role of the Forestry Commission, which has sometimes set a bad example. Until recently, its grant regime militated against the planting of hard woods. I join the hon. Member for Garscadden in looking forward to a much more responsible planting regime and more

emphasis being placed on hardwoods, oaks, poplars, birches and other woods more in keeping with Scotland's natural heritage.

The afforestation of glens had damaged fisheries. Fisheries on the River Oykell and River Brora have been adversely affected by afforestation carried out by the Forestry Commission. The run-off has been greatly enhanced, so in heavy rain the river rises more quickly and bursts its banks, but it goes down quickly. Migratory fish come too fast up the river when it is in spate, with the result that fisheries are adversely affected, which in turn has a damaging effect on rural economies.

I know that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North will agree with that, because he is aware of the importance of fisheries to the local economy and of the fact that a rod-caught salmon is worth probably £150 to the rural economy, whereas a salmon caught in a net is probably worth the going rate in Aberdeen fish market. I know that, up to a point, poaching is acceptable in Scotland, but what is not acceptable any more is the degree of commercial netting of estuaries. It goes without saying that some of the worst offenders are the owners of riparian fisheries.

Mr. Wilson: I am obliged for the opportunity to dissociate myself from what I was assumed to agree with. The netting of salmon is an ancient and honourable rural occupation in Scotland. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman added the caveat that much of the most ruthless commercial netting is done by riparian owners, who will hound and persecute a local person who is netting a few salmon but at the same time net salmon illegally and in huge quantities to make large profits for themselves. We both know of an estate on the island of Lewis that is more guilty perhaps than any.

Mr. Bellingham: I shall not comment on that estate, in case I am not asked back there to fish.

Riparian owners have carried out excessive netting in some Scottish rivers. Some fishery owners rightly protect their fishing and will do what they can to prevent poaching. However, there are exceptions because some riparian landowners engage in commercial netting. The worst possible example is to be found on the Tay, where the riparian owners of two major salmon fisheries, both of them lucrative and sought after, are among the biggest commercial netters on the Tay. That is totally unacceptable.

We must address the problem of the Northumberland drift net fishery. Drift net fishing is illegal in Scotland, and if we are to combat it, especially off the west coast of Scotland, we must tackle the wanton destruction of fish stocks by large commercial poachers. Poaching for the pot for local people may be acceptable, but totally unacceptable is the increase of poaching using long monofilament drift nets. Last summer, a couple of trawlers were apprehended which between them had 10 miles of monofilament drift net. It is difficult for us to criticise that while we condone the Northumberland drift net fishery. I shall not go into too much detail on that, but we know that it takes many fish every year. Livelihoods depend on it, but many more depend on wild salmon running up Scottish rivers.

I wish the new body well and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that it takes an urgent look at the relationship between fisheries, the rural economy and the part played by wild migratory fish in the natural heritage. I also urge him to ensure that such a study encompasses fish farms and the demise of sea trout off the west coast of Scotland and the Western Isles.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence pointing to appalling reductions in the runs of sea trout. Two examples are Loch Maree and the River Gruinard where large runs of sea trout have dropped to virtually zero. That has had an appalling effect on local hotels, the local economy and tourism. One possible explanation is the big increase in salmon farming and the placing of salmon cages in the mouths of rivers that are used by migratory sea trout. No one seems to know the exact cause of the demise. However, we do know that salmon farms have the potential for creating disease and for distorting local marine ecosystems. There is plenty of evidence showing the extent to which that has happened in Norway. I urge the Minister to look carefully at this matter and to persuade the new body to include it in a report on fishing. Migratory fish do not just contribute to the economy but are a part of the natural heritage.

That is enough about fishing. I welcome the Bill's provisions about irrigation. There is a need for wider control of the use of water for irrigation throughout this country. Arguably, there is less need for such control in Scotland, and the structure that the Bill seeks to introduce would fit happily into East Anglia, parts of which have excessive irrigation from small watercourses. That irrigation continues even after drought orders, when most rivers are running low.

Last summer in my constituency, the National Rivers Authority applied to abstract water from the greensand layer—that is, from below groundwater level, to try to ensure a greater flow in the River Nar at West Acre. One way to solve such a problem is to reduce irrigation. I urge the water plcs and the NRA to consider pressing for England and Wales to have the legislative structure of this Scottish Bill. I welcome the Bill, but it is a pity that we will not have a similar one for England and Wales.

Some hon. Members have said that people who own and farm and play a part in Scotland's environment are but temporary custodians of that part of our national heritage. Scotland is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. I have been fortunate enough to travel around most countries in Europe, and for outstanding natural beauty, Scotland is way ahead of all of them. It is fitting that we should play a part in a Bill that will help to protect that natural heritage and will make it easier for the temporary tenants and custodians better to manage the environment. I am pleased to support the Bill.

7.56 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): It is grotesque for the House to be discussing this subject, important though it is to us all, when we should have an opportunity to discuss the Gulf and the bombing of Basra. I have been lucky enough to secure an Adjournment debate on the Gulf tomorrow night. When one thinks of the issues that are involved, one asks how we can spend six hours on this measure and make do with an Adjournment debate on the Gulf. I do not understand the priorities. However, I shall leave the matter there.

I express genuine concern about the opening speech. I had imagined that, as soon as the matter of the Lords amendment was raised, the Minister would give an easy and unequivocal undertaking to try to reverse it. That

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

would have had the support of the Opposition. When two of us on the Back Benchers and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) pressed the Secretary of State for Scotland, his answer was very different. He said that something would come forward but not "in that form". I invite the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to tell me whether I have misunderstood in any way. Is he prepared to say exactly what the Government think about the Lords amendment? He does not seem very happy about it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): My right hon. Friend made it clear that the clause is unacceptable and technically defective. I shall speak about that in my winding-up speech.

Mr. Dalyell: That is exactly what troubles me. The Minister speaks of "some technical flaw" and says that it is not technically all right, but this is a matter of principle —it is central to the Bill. I shall have to talk to my hon. Friends, but I am tempted to vote against the Bill, because it is not what we were presented with or what we thought we were coming to discuss when we arrived here at 3.30.

I shall briefly go over the facts as I understand them. On the evening of 22 January, a group of Peers consisting of mainly of Scots succeeded in forcing through an amendment to the Bill that would effectively undo all the work on sites of special scientific interest in Scotland undertaken since the enactment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There is no doubt about that. I served on the Committee which examined the Bill which became that Act, and this change is a torpedo amidships. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) who knows a lot about these matters and the legislation pertaining to them, is nodding his head in agreement.

The changes to the Bill will make any new nature conservation work in Scotland subject to a veto by local landed interests. Do the Government deny that? I do not think that they do. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) who is a lawyer, and who could take a different point of view, does not dispute it. Such work would be subject to a veto.

The change would open up the prospect of the boundaries of SSSIs in Scotland being redrawn at the behest of large landowners. That is precisely what conservationists feared when the abolition of the NCC was announced in July 1989.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman gave the misleading impression that I accepted his interpretation of clause 9. However, I see no way in which the unravelling of the designations that have already been made would flow from it. "Review" does not necessarily mean withdrawal of SSSI status. Nor does the proposal that there should be a local inquiry mean that the other place or any other landed interest would have a right of veto. The hon. Gentleman is giving a tendentious and rather dubious interpretation of the effect of clause 9.

Mr. Dalyell: I should like the Minister to comment on the hon. Gentleman's view. It is quite possible that he is right and my interpretation is wrong, but it is a view held by the trade union side of the NCC. Other people have interpreted it in the same way as I have, including Dr. Derek Ratcliffe, who was the chief scientist at Peterborough.

"But Government, both then and during the whole of 1990, constantly denied any intention to water down the NCC's powers when the new country agencies were established, saying that the changes were purely administrative. The amendments to the Bill however are very radical indeed and actually undermine the whole basis of the 1981 act in its application to Scotland. Their significance can hardly be overstated."

That is the trade union view and, I gather, one taken on legal advice.

The Government opposed both the crucial amendments, but although the Government spokesman condemned them in strong terms—such as "idiotic", "wasteful", "inefficient", "costly" and "technically flawed" —they were agreed to. The question asked by many of the staff is therefore this: was it a conspiracy or just a cock-up? Perhaps the Minister will answer that question.

The second issue is the extraordinary personal nature of the abuse heaped on the NCC staff by various peers in the debate. I read the debate and I was shocked by what was said.

Mr. McKelvey: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend agrees with me. The staff in Scotland were caricatured as powerless puppets of the evil string-pullers in Peterborough. That was the view of Lord Dundee and Lord Taylor. Lord Grimond said that they were blindly "obstinate", mistaken and "pig-headed". Lord Burton spoke as though they were little better than clueless morons who had designated sites without knowing why and without even having visited them. That is bad. I could go through quotes from other peers, but suffice it to say that the facts were contorted. My concern is not so much that the peers made these statements: it is that the Minister did not refute them. When I invited the Secretary of State to do so, while he praised the staff, he did not refute those statements. The Government should stick up for their employees.

I have a specific question, for which I take responsibility. May we have the clear, categorical, unambiguous, uneconomical with the truth assurance that no one in the Scottish Office, either Minister or civil servant, had anything to do with the Pearson amendment? There was not, was there, any discussion with Lord Pearson about the amendment?

Mr. Maclennan: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but in this matter of attitudes to civil servants, he is expressing views which are not consistent with his earlier expression of opinion. For example, in the case of the former head of the civil service, Lord Armstrong, the hon. Gentleman never called on the former Prime Minister to support Lord Armstrong when the hon. Gentleman considered that he was wrong. Similarly, he never called on the former Prime Minister to support Mr. Bernard Ingham when he thought that Mr. Ingham was wrong. Many people feel that some of the civil servants employed by the NCC have been extremely insensitive and, although the language used by Members in another place is sometimes colourful, as it was in that debate, there is at least as much feeling behind those remarks as there has been behind remarks that the hon. Gentleman has made about other civil servants on other occasions.

Mr. Dalyell: I had an Adjournment debate on the role of the former Prime Minister's press secretary. I had better not be diverted.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Nobody could have had a conversation along the lines that the hon. Gentleman suggests, because it would have been contrary to Government policy.

Mr. Dalyell: In that case, is that an assurance that no such discussions with Lord Pearson took place? If it is, I will accept it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Lord Pearson sent me the amendments shortly before the debate, but I had no discussions with him about them.

Mr. Dalyell: Then I shall continue with Lord Pearson, who appeared to invite any member of the Nature Conservancy Council staff in Scotland who intended to work for Scottish Natural Heritage, and who was committed to the principles embodied in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, either to abandon that commitment or to resign. Lord Dundee and Lord Taylor of Gryfe both represented NCC staff in Scotland as mere pawns in a game controlled by political grandmasters in Peterborough, a distortion of reality——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Is the hon. Gentleman quoting from the *Official Report?*

Mr. Dalyell: I am quoting from a letter written to the Secretary of State for Scotland by the staff side of the NCC on 31 January 1991.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is permissible, but I should be obliged if the hon. Gentleman would paraphrase to some extent and not quote quite so much from the letter.

Mr. Dalyell: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not wish to detain the House by quoting at length. I think that the general point has been made.

Mr. Morley: Apart from the insults that were levelled at members of the NCC by those in another place, some of their Lordships' comments were extremely inaccurate. It was alleged that the NCC had declared that certain sites were sites of special scientific interest for no reason, or for reasons of which it was not aware. Such assertions were complete and utter nonsense. One Member of another place talked about a site being declared an SSSI because of mysterious circles in a field. That and many other assertions were rubbish. We should understand that some people pick up these statements and take them to be true when they are merely allegations without foundation. They merely represent the blind prejudice that is directed towards a public body that is doing its job.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend's intervention reflects the fact that some decent people who work for the Government service and who have given their lives to that service are extremely angry about the way in which they have been treated. I, too, am angry because I know some of the people concerned. I shall use just one more quotation. It comes from the letter of 28 January from Dr. Derek Ratcliffe, which was addressed to the Secretary of State. The third paragraph ends as follows:

"Some of the remarks about scientists and staff at the NCC, made under the protection of parliamentary privilege, are openly insulting to people who cannot reply. They deserve an apology."

Will that apology be forthcoming?

I concede that in a sense it is not for Ministers to make the apology, other than in one respect. Would they have preferred their colleague, who is a Minister in the other place, to be a little more robust in defence of the staff of the NCC? I hope that that issue will be settled today as I would not want it to pervade, in rather bad blood, discussion on the Bill. It is something that had better be ironed out soon. It is a potential cancer. The Under-Secretary of State, who is a sensitive man and one who is concerned about people, had better give his attention to what has happened and try to iron out the real difficulties to which my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe and others have referred.

I have time for just one other point. During the passage of the 1981 Act, there was considerable discussion of marine nature reserves. Some of us have been concerned that it has taken so long to establish what we believe is a worthwhile aspect of their work. I give the Minister warning that, if I am a member of the Committee which considers the Bill, I shall wish to pursue the proposal for a United Kingdom coastal zone management plan, which Dr. Gubbay and others have put forward. They and I regard such a plan as extremely important.

I am aware that there are others who wish to contribute to the debate, but I make no apology for trying to get out of the way the ambiguity—to use a generalised term—about what has happened. I should have made a different speech if the Secretary of State had replied differently to my original question.

8.14 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I shall be brief, as I have only a few remarks to make on the Bill, which follows on naturally from the Environmental Protection Act 1990. I was fortunate to be a member of the Committee which considered that measure and it examined the Nature Conservancy Councils and the Countryside Commission at some length. It is good that there seems to be more agreement about this Bill than there was in the debates on the Environmental Protection Bill, which led to the splitting up of the NCC among the three countries of the United Kingdom.

One objective of the 1990 Act which I welcomed especially was the introduction of better regulation to encourage the protection of the environment. More specifically, it was designed to ensure that that regulation was at the right level. On the one hand, we had the strengthening of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the introduction of integrated pollution control. On the other, the Bill considerably increased powers for local authorities to deal with the better clearing up of litter, for example. A regulation under the 1990 Act to that effect is coming into force this week and I am sure that that measure will be welcomed by everyone.

The provisions in the 1990 measure that were designed to protect the countryside were probably the most controversial parts of it. There were lively debates on whether the work done by the NCC at Peterborough was right. Hon. Members debated whether the NCC was too remote from what was taking place at ground level, or whether, as a result of a centralised, bureaucratic

[Mr. Keith Mans]

structure, a more overall view could be taken of the protection of the environment throughout the British isles. The result of those debates was the splitting up of the NCC.

We now see the second phase of that discussion and the ensuing decision, the coming together of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland. I believe that it is clearly the way in which we should proceed. The level of regulation is about right, but it is always difficult to reconcile the needs of the professionals when it comes to protecting the environment with those of the people who live in the regions, especially when they are remote from the centre.

We see plenty of examples of that elsewhere, most notably in planning. For example, the Council for the Protection of Rural England rightly wants to ensure that measures associated with new housing estates, new roads and new infrastructure projects do not destroy the countryside. Local people see the need for certain measures to be implemented, only to find that their wishes are thwarted by national or even Europewide bodies, which override their wishes. It is important that we involve people locally as much as possible. The structure that is being created by the Bill will work in the right way. If we are to secure the proper protection and improvement of our environment, we must involve those who live in the areas concerned.

I read with interest some of the remarks in the debate in another place. As the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said, some of the language was most colourful. That showed the tremendous interest of those in another place in matters associated with the environment. Their Lordships may not always agree with various people's points of view, but their language shows—

Mr. Morley: I do not necessarily disagree with the main thrust of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Does he agree with me, however, that some of their Lordships, and especially Lord Burton, who is a landowner, were acting in a way which in local government would be considered corrupt? Lord Burton was tabling amendments to benefit himself—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should be careful with his language, as he well knows, when referring to Members in another place.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am choosing my words very carefully in making the point that, in local government, such behaviour would be considered totally corrupt. The peers in question took that action in their own interests—not for the sake of nature conservation or the wider community, which includes those like myself who do not live in Scotland, but respect and appreciate its heritage. The hon. Gentleman must share my concern about the future.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman makes his own point. I prefer not to comment on any speech made in another place, but at least the debate showed that interest in, and concern about, the environment exists at all levels. Although some right hon. and hon. Members may not hold the same view as some of their Lordships, the fact that the environment can be the subject of lively debate in another place must be a good thing.

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) feels strongly about some issues and I respect him for that. I know that he did not favour the original proposals, but I am uncertain of his views on the Bill now before us. Perhaps it moves more in the direction he wants, but I shall not comment further on what was said in another place.

Regulation and the involvement of the community is vital in protecting the environment, and alienation of local people from regulating organisations can only have an unsatisfactory outcome, with some distance being created between those responsible for enforcing the regulations and those who will, in many cases, suffer as a consequence.

The Bill encourages greater involvement between the voluntary and private sectors, local communities and academic and research institutes which will be of great benefit in developing a better environment. It should also help to create among the staff themselves a better understanding and awareness of the wide range of local needs and attitudes. The Bill builds effectively on the results already achieved by the Environmental Protection Act 1990, by bringing together two important institutions and making them more effective in tackling matters of concern to not only people in Scotland but those, like myself, who live in England but often visit Scotland.

In that regard, the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), who has detailed knowledge of the fishing industry and of the position in Scotland——

Mr. Wilson: For the hon. Gentleman to claim that the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) has detailed knowledge of the Scottish fishing industry is curious. The hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West has detailed knowledge only of the sporting estates of the western isles and highlands. I am sure that he would claim no more. The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) is confused if he imagines that Conservative Members who hold forth on the sporting estates of Scotland are authorities on that country and its people.

Mr. Mans: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I should have used the words "sport fishing." I made that mistake because, as I have a port in my constituency, I often speak about the relationship between the English and Scottish fishing industries. However, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, my hon. Friend was speaking only about sport fishing.

I believe that we have reached the stage at which we have got environmental protection in Scotland just about right. The Bill goes in a direction that I would like to be followed in respect of Wales and England. Much attention has been paid to the Scottish environment, and rightly so, but I hope that the measures that will flow from the Bill will progressively be adopted for England and Wales as well.

8.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), in a thoughtful speech, pointed up the consensus that has been reached in respect of the Bill. I welcome the creation of an overall Scottish body that will bring greater integration to the task of environmental

protection in Scotland. However, I am disappointed with the Bill's powers and remits. A great opportunity has been lost to create a fully financed and empowered Scottish environmental protection agency instead of the natural heritage agency for which the Bill provides. The two are not the same.

One of the Bill's glaring flaws is clause 11, which concerns sites of special scientific interest. The Minister admitted that clause 11 is flawed and said that it will be revised. He should go further and remove it altogether. Sites of special scientific interest are a key element in the United Kingdom's conservation strategy, providing the primary mechanism for protecting species and maintaining biodiversity. SSSI status serves as notification of scientific value, but it is not a designation conferring prohibition powers. The only obligation on the landholder is to consult if certain operations listed as potentially damaging are being considered. Thereafter, it provides an opportunity to influence the landholder by means of a voluntary management agreement, supported by compensation based on profit forgone.

The system has its weaknesses. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and other hon. Members referred to them—but clause 11 is a blunderbuss that will create more problems than it seeks to solve. The costs and bureaucracy involved in the series of reviews and public inquiries for which clause 11 provides would be enormous, and would undoubtedly hogtie the new agency in its formative years.

If Scottish Natural Heritage is to operate properly, it must be given every resource and opportunity to consider the wider issues of protecting and improving the Scottish environment. The Minister's promise to reconsider clause 11 must be backed with genuine alterations—although I should prefer it to be deleted altogether, given that the existing system could be improved by making minor alterations, rather than by major surgery.

I welcome the Government's commitment to the concept of sustainable resources. It has a considerable pedigree and is aimed at establishing a broader base for Scottish conservation—beyond the narrow protection provided by specialist interests and aesthetic values. That concept is designed to meet present needs, without jeopardising the interests of future generations. The concept of sustainable resources embraces the view that conservation is the basis of sound development, by using resources that can be replaced and restocked.

Bearing in mind the global importance of that concept, its central position in the Government's approach to the Bill and the immense value of legislation in improving awareness and altering attitudes, why is it that sustainable resources are not included as a definition in the Bill? The Government should produce definitions that reflect the practical implications of sustainability, the preservation of biological diversity, the protection of natural ecosystems and the sustainable use of resources. I want the Government to lay down that definition because the Bill will be an immense influence on the way that Scottish Natural Heritage nurtures and improves the Scottish environment.

Mr. Maclennan: I accept what the hon. Gentleman said about the long heritage of the word "sustainable". Does he agree that that does not always resolve difficulties where there are genuine conflicts of interest? For example, in the case of extractive industries such as marble—which is about to be quarried in my constituency—I cannot see how they can be described as sustainable. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that marble should not be quarried in Scotland?

Mr. Welsh: I am quite clear in my mind what I mean by sustainable resources—those resources capable of being sustained. However, when I consider the overview of the environment in Scotland, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. No Government have produced a proper overview taking into account how to subdivide or allocate resources between such competing interests. The Government's approach is bitty. There are too many individual clashes here and there and they do not fit into a scheme which would allow such competition to be properly resolved within an overall plan for the Scottish economy, once these decisions are taken.

Will the collective insight and brains of the Scottish Office reconsider this issue, because a clear definition of sustainable resources would be massively important for directing the efforts of everyone involved towards producing the sort of Scottish environment described by the Government in the document "The Way Ahead"?

Will the Government consider balancing duties? It has been normal practice to give conservation agencies advisory powers only and to require Ministers, Departments and executive agencies to operate under the balancing duties contained in the relevant legislation. The wording of existing legislation refers only to aesthetic qualities, yet a prime function of the Bill is to introduce new aspects of conservation to deal with the sustainable use of natural resources, as a primary duty of SNH.

The Government have chosen the phrase "sustainable resources"; the wording of the present balancing duties will have to be updated so that that new obligation is also imposed on Departments and agencies directly responsible for the use of resources in forestry, agriculture, fisheries, red deer and tourism. Why cannot the Bill be more specific about the Government's duties with regard to conservation? Why is no positive obligation placed on specific Ministries connected with land use? In his winding up speech, will the Under-Secretary say whether the Government will introduce a clear definition?

I am disappointed that the Government seem to want to restrict and predetermine Scottish Natural Heritage's attitude to land access and usage. It would be a mistake to imagine that there is only one solution to every problem throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, and it would be a mistake not to tailor solutions to suit different needs in different parts of the country. There are areas where there should be absolutely no development whatsoever, areas where there should be limited development and areas where development should be positively encouraged to help their economy and society. Scottish Natural Heritage should be sufficiently flexible and sensitive to local needs to allow for such diversity. Indeed, no environmental agency worthy of the name would seek to duck issues such as nuclear dumping, or the need to balance the requirement of people who earn a living from the land and the need to conserve the beauty of the countryside.

SNH must take full account of the views of all local communities involved when it takes decisions. An environmental agency should take account not merely of land but, by definition, of people and their cultural and other needs.

[Mr. Welsh]

The problem is that SNH will be a quango—it is a Government creature. It is nominated by the Secretary of State and, because it is a quango, it is essential that accountability for decision-making links it with the wishes of the local community. I should like a more democratic structure for SNH than the Government are prepared to allow. Because it is a quango, its decisions must be sensitive to the wishes of local populations and take them fully into account.

No hon. Member has mentioned the Bill's impact on European directives on the environment. I wonder whether a clause should be added to the Bill to develop expertise in European Community law as it affects the environment. There is nothing of that nature in the Bill at present. In future, SNH will be more and more affected by developments in Europe, as we all shall be. Has the Minister thought of that? Will some means be provided to consider developments in European law and directives from the European Community?

A major weakness in the Government's approach to the environment is that it seems to have no overall direction. The current approach towards a large, but definitely finite, national asset is bitty. There has never been a national land use survey, but that should be the first step towards intelligent and national policies for the environment. That failure has led to a host of problems over local conflicts between conservationists and developers because no overall strategy exists. For example, there is no national skiing policy for Scotland; there are merely skiing guidelines. Yet there is massive and continuing development of skiing, mountaineering, hill walking and associated activities. The problem will not go away and the only way to tackle these issues in a logical and sensible fashion is through an overall land use strategy combining commercial, leisure and conservation needs.

The Bill is disappointing, but it is probably all that we are likely to get, and it is to be hoped that it will be much improved in Committee.

8.36 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): One of the most interesting aspects of the Bill and of tonight's debate is that, considering the anger and annoyance portrayed by many organisations and individuals, including many Opposition Members, about the Government's original proposals, the fact that we are discussing the Bill in such a spirit of near-unanimity—except on matters of detail—does credit to the way in which we have progressed. Hon. Members have recognised that the Government's position was right. While we can debate many issues for long hours in the House, and most hon. Members would agree that if the Government get it wrong it can be put right at a later date, that does not necessarily apply to the environment. Once we get a decision wrong, it may be wrong for ever and a day afterwards. Consensus is more important for environmental issues than for others.

It is essential that the Under-Secretary should make it clear that the Government will resist any attempt by Scottish Natural Heritage to become the poodle of any special interest. The Government's reaction to clause 11 will be indicative of their intent. If the Bill and SNH are to fulfil the role that we hope, it must be totally even-handed in its approach to all the organisations, individuals and problems with which it will have to deal. It will have to recognise that the landscape of Scotland, like all landscapes, is constantly changing.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), and I slightly resent his insinuation that one has to live in Scotland to care about it. The hon. Gentleman suggests that that was not the impression that he wished to give. That was my impression, but I accept his withdrawal. Perhaps I am too sensitive, but, as one who spends a vast amount of time in Scotland and has a family there, I am second to none in my love and concern for the landscape of that country.

SNH will have to recognise that not only landscapes but rural communities change. A sad aspect of many members of the conservation movement is that they want to freeze-frame communities or landscapes. That simply is not possible: it has never happened in the history of the world, and it never will happen. Communities are a dynamic, constantly evolving organism, which lives, declines, expands and contracts; and such changes will continue for ever.

SNH will also have to resist the more starry-eyed conservationists—resist, that is, not only any attempt to freeze-frame the environment, but what may superficially appear to be wonderful environmental care. In theory, it may be an excellent idea to stop killing red deer because it is wrong; in practice, however, that leads to a superfluous population and an attendant weakening of the stock, with many animals dying of starvation and other ailments. I therefore welcome the extension of the powers of the Red Deer Commission.

I have spoken in the House before about forestry. I agree with many hon. Members on both sides of the House that what has happened in Scotland has been to the detriment of both the landscape and the image of the forestry industry; we should recognise, however, that modern forestry practice has ways of tailoring forestry much more closely to the landscape, using contours in the planning of forests, and soil types in deciding which trees to plant in various areas. It has ways of ameliorating the worst effects of forestry planting.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) pointed out, much of Scotland was once afforested, albeit in an entirely different way and with a different species of tree from the one that is now so common in that country. We must recognise that there is a role for forestry in Scotland, and SNH will play an important role in judging the suitability of terrains for planting. I share the concerns of the Select Committee on Agriculture: I hope that we shall look more carefully at how we can improve our forestry planting. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) rightly referred to the tremendous drop in planting, which bodes ill for the long-term future.

I do not wish to detain the House; I know that other hon. Members wish to comment on this important Bill—an essential Bill, which will mean a great deal to the heritage, landscape and conservation of Scotland. All hon. Members, whatever part of the United Kingdom they represent, should be proud to be associated with it.

8.44 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I found the speech of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) sympathetic, and I certainly do not quarrel wth his right to comment on the Bill. He mentioned the report of the Select Committee on Agriculture. Let me simply say that we have a constitutional problem in Scotland; we have no Select Committee on Scottish affairs, and we have therefore been unable to consider the issues in the necessary detail. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will concede that there should be such a Committee—and, indeed, that it would be far better for legislation such as this, which applies exclusively to Scotland, to be dealt with in a directly elected Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: No; there is not much time left.

The debate, rightly, has concentrated heavily on clause 11 and their Lordships' debate on it, I must say that the House of Lords has not shown itself in a particularly positive light on this occasion. We have heard the old chestnut that Members of the House of Lords represent no one but themselves, and represent their constituents very well; they appear to have tried to do that on this occasion.

I accept what the Liberal Democrats have said about the need for consultation, and perhaps an appeals procedure, to deal with the designation of new SSSIs. There is, however, a world of difference between that and wiping the map clean of SSSIs and starting all over again, which would be the crazy effect of the Lords amendment. It is rather alarming to reflect that, such is the power of highlands landowners in the House of Lords, that they can out-vote the combined whipping efforts of Government and official Opposition, which is what happened in this instance.

I do not quite understand how these people can think that they are addressing a genuine fear about a genuine problem—a malign imposition on crofters, farmers and landowners anywhere in Scotland. I have represented a largely rural Scottish constituency for 12 years. For five years, I was Member of Parliament for the two counties of Berwickshire and East Lothian; for the past seven years I have represented East Lothian—again, a largely rural area covering much of the south side of the firth of Forth and, now, only the north face of the Lammermuir hills. I have never heard a single complaint from a farmer or landowner about difficulties arising from the designation of an SSSI, and I do not know what all the fuss is about.

Perhaps I should have declared an interest. I am a farmer myself, and the only SSSI adjacent to the land that I farm is the River Tweed. I wish that it were a rather higher grade of SSSI, because it would then be possible to control water skiing activities and water scooters, which are making a lot of noise and stirring up the river. I do not want to downgrade that SSSI; I think that it should be upgraded. I hope that the amendment tabled rather maliciously in the other place will be treated with the contempt that it deserves.

I welcome the amalgamation of the Scottish Nature Conservancy Council with the Countryside Commission for Scotland—not least because I do not think that many people knew the difference between them anyway. The amalgamation will clarify the issue, and, I hope, draw together the various strands of policy about management of the countryside.

I do not know whether I shall be fortunate enough to be a member of the Standing Committee; no doubt the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East will be—[HON. MEMBERS: "South-East."] I am sorry—South-East. Everyone who influences anything in the House nowadays seems to represent the south-east. He will probably be a member of the Committee, but a good many mere Scots on the Opposition Benches, such as myself, will not have that opportunity. Nevertheless, I hope that the Committee will produce some thoughtful guidelines for SNH, under its totally independent Icelandic chairmanship.

I have considerable doubts about the principle of national parks, which has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). I take very seriously the fears that have been expressed about the risk of overloading the so-called honeypot areas with visitors: I feel that all rural Scotland should be treated as a national asset and should be safeguarded—primarily for the benefit of those who live and work there, but also for that of the rest of Scotland's population and, indeed, the tourist industry, which is so important to us.

There must be a radical review of the whole theme of agricultural support policy, and I think that it should be part of this debate. The time has come to incorporate in the system of agricultural support ways of encouraging farmers to look after their land that are not only good for food production, but good for the landscape and for other rural industries, including tourism. We have begun to do that in environmentally sensitive areas that have already been designated. The theme could usefully be expanded.

I wish Scottish Natural Heritage well. We need to establish a partnership between it and local authorities in Scotland. Conservation must be balanced with sensitive development in rural areas. I cannot resist taking this opportunity to refer to a highly controversial issue in my constituency. I realise that the Minister cannot comment on what I am about to say, for reasons that both he and I know.

It is proposed that there should be a major development in the countryside of East Lothian. My constituents and I strongly support the redevelopment and the preservation of the listed building on the Archerfield estate. We would support a change of use from farmland to recreation. However, it must be sensitive. We need to attract more visitors to the area and to improve the local economy. The controversy is over whether the package should be financed by means of a substantial private housing development. Both local and national debate is needed on how best sensitively to promote economic development in rural areas.

Part II deals with irrigation and part III with drought. The two are related. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) referred to the problems on the Tay. There is no Scottish legislation to control the abstraction of water from rivers. We have a problem with the River Tyne in my constituency. It runs almost dry in the summer because so much water is taken out of it to irrigate farmland. That causes problems for anglers and others. I welcome the fact that the Bill will make it possible to control river flows in areas subject to such a risk.

I hope that the Bill will provide a basis for sound legislation to protect Scotland's natural environment. It

[Mr. Home Robertson]

would have been better if it could have been considered in a Scottish Parliament rather than here, but, I hope that this Parliament will make a good job of it.

8.52 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I am happy to associate myself with the Labour party's view; that the Bill presents an important opportunity to contribute positively to the framing of laws that will make the conservation of Scotland's natural heritage as effective as possible. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said, it would have been much nicer to have discussed the Bill at home in Scotland, in a directly elected Scottish Assembly.

I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) but I am disappointed that he omitted to say anything about Scotch whisky. That is part of our heritage. He is the chairperson of the all-party Scotch whisky group. I noticed that he managed to mention covertly that he had anchored in Loch Sween in order to buy a bottle of Drambuie. In doing so, he mentioned the Isle of Rhum and Fiona Guinness. He therefore managed to get Drambuie, rum and Guinness into his speech, which I suppose was helpful.

The work of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs was invaluable, in that it gave Members of Parliament the opportunity to travel throughout Scotland. I saw many rural areas that I would not otherwise have visited. I hope that the Select Committee will be reconstituted as soon as possible. Its work on Scottish affairs was invaluable.

I vividly recall standing on the Isle of Eigg watching the sun shine on the Isle of Rhum. It brought out its vivid colours. It was the finest view I had ever seen in Scotland. I cannot describe in words what the Isle of Rhum looks like, but it is an incredible part of Scotland. I want it preserved, but not simply for people to stand on the Isle of Eigg and view it. I want people to be able to live on the Isle of Rhum, because there is work there for them to do. People must go to live there, not just for conservation purposes. I want crofters to return to the island and make a living for themselves. Other work must also be available for people on the Isle of Rhum and on other Scottish islands.

Opposition Members are rightly concerned about clause 11. I do not understand the Minister's coyness and hesitancy. He said that the clause was technically incorrect. Technical questions ought not to concern us. What concerns us is the morality of the clause. I hope that the Minister will say unequivocally that the Government intend to remove it from the Bill. We do not want it tampered or tinkered with. It must be removed.

Our briefings make it clear that the review of the SSSI appeals procedure is inappropriate. Between 1,000 and 1,300 sites have already been designated. To review the designation of those sites would take five years. I should be horrified if I were to be told that that was the reason for the inclusion of the clause in the other place. I hope that the Government will do their duty to the people of Scotland and remove the clause.

No one has told the House how the natural heritage areas will fit into the overall plan. We do not know whether they will be part of or excluded from the national parks. I am concerned about the concepts of national parks. National parks should be protected, but, at the same time, should be developed for people to live in and work the land; we should not have simply a protected wilderness. There may be parts of Scotland that we wish to retain as protected wildernesses, but we shall certainly not retain the whole north-west of Scotland as a protected wilderness. We want people to live in those areas and to have a decent life there.

Time is short and many hon. Members wish to speak. We will have a much more earnest discussion of the matter in Committee.

8.58 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I am grateful to intervene briefly at the end of the debate, to which I have listened with great interest because of the extent to which there has been agreement at least about some of the purposes of the Bill and the recognition that the Bill is an attempt to resolve a difficult problem. The promotion of the appreciation of our national heritage in Scotland has been tackled with effectiveness by the Government. I welcome the Bill. It marks a possible new beginning in Scotland. Therefore, my comments about a possible improvement should be seen against that background.

Throughout the debates on these subjects since 1981 there has been a failure to recognise that there cannot be an absolute scientific criterion for assessing what piece of land should be protected from all development. The scientific criteria that are advanced from time to time are the product of the judgment of individuals who have no doubt carefully considered such matters and who bring to their judgment good faith and a background of knowledge. They have examined other countries and they mostly have training in the natural sciences but, in the last analysis, they bring to that judgment a subjective view of what is important. People should pay attention to that view, but they should not treat it as absolute.

I draw an analogy from another sphere which involves our important heritage—the way in which the Government deal with the possible export of cultural artefacts, paintings and so on. A committee reviews their importance and considers whether to recommend to the Government that there should be a ban on their export. Those who make that judgment are very skilled, they have a great knowledge, and their advice is certainly worth listening to, but they do not take the decision not to lose to our heritage those great works of art—it is taken by a Minister of the Crown, who can ban export to give others the opportunity to seek to acquire the works. The analogy is not exact, but it is relevant that there is a democratic procedure for dealing with works of art that are part of our heritage but that such a procedure is missing in consideration of our natural heritage. That is a defect.

It was to remedy that defect that the House of Lords introduced clause 11. However badly constructed the clause was, it sought to introduce a democratic procedure. That was not initiated by the fact that it came from the other place. As it happens, we do not have in the House of Lords many representatives of the crofting community who could speak on such issues, but if there were elected crofters in the upper House I do not think that their voices would have been very different.

Crofters have complained to me about the insensitivity of officials of the Nature Conservancy Council. Crofters

have come to me and said, "Do you know that we have had people telling us that the grazings committee has already approved this measure and that we, as members of the grazings committee, should withdraw our objection to allow the proposed designation of an SSSI to go through unchallenged?" I have had representations from small farmers, smallholders, large landowners, and from people of all condition about the absence of a democratic stop to allow the consideration of whether something is appropriate. Sometimes that has worked.

There was a case in west Halladale in Sutherland in my constituency, when the crofters objected. The common grazings committee objected. It was interesting that, when it reached a compromise solution and accepted part of the crofters' case, the Nature Conservancy Council did not concede the point because the ground was not scientifically important or that potentially it could not be designated as an SSSI.

Mr. Dewar: It was a small adjustment.

Mr. Maclennan: As the hon. Gentleman says, it was a tiny adjustment. If the NCC was considering the matter simply according to scientific criteria and not on the basis of the impact, the size is irrelevant. I believe that often the judgments reached are not made on the basis of scientific criteria. At least in my constituency, there is no doubt that the NCC has, perhaps understandably, designated areas where there are proposals to afforest.

Mr. Dewar: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I know that the closing speeches will start shortly. I would understand his point more completely if I were satisfied that, once an area had been designated an SSSI, an outside body, whether the NCC or any other, had the power to tell landowners that they could not do something. Such bodies can say that they do not want a landowner to do something and if the landowner agrees to abide by their suggestions they can pay compensation for his forbearance, but if the landowner simply says, "To hell with that —I am going to go ahead," the existence of the SSSI will not stop him. That seems to be the weakness in the indignation about the right of appeal.

Mr. Maclennan: I am glad to have the opportunity to explain why there is such indignation. The practical consequence of designation is that it becomes impossible to go ahead and afforest if the afforestation depends upon the payment of grant. To crofters and smallholders, afforestation is simply impossible to contemplate without the payment of grant. In my constituency, a practice is developing whereby anyone who is interested in afforestation applies to the Forestry Commission, which then asks the NCC whether it has any interest in the piece of land. If the NCC says yes, the Forestry Commission will tell the landowner that it is not prepared to make a payment. The NCC does not even need to designate the area. It does not matter, for example, that the regional advisory committee of the Forestry Commission has advised that the area is suitable for afforestation. The last word lies with the NCC.

That is not the right way to approach the matter. There should be a balancing of interests. We already have several bodies. We have the Red Deer Commission, the Crofters Commission, the Forestry Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council and now we shall have Scottish Natural Heritage in its place. If all land use interests are subordinated to the view of Scottish Natural Heritage and its decisions are not appellable, it will be viewed with as much disfavour as the NCC was viewed in Scotland. I hope that that will not be so.

The letter which Magnus Magnusson wrote to Lord Strathclyde, a copy of which is available to hon. Members, does not convince me that Magnus Magnusson proposes a system which would allow an appeal against a proposed designation. He certainly intends to set up some sub-committees and a scientific committee to consider proposals, but in the last analysis the decision will remain with the new body, Scottish Natural Heritage.

However widely the community interest may be affected, I fear that there will be no stop in the way of SNH. That would indeed be a pity. It is a difficult problem for the Government, the Opposition and, indeed, the whole House to resolve how we are to bring into the deliberations some democratic mechanism for checking the final designation. We need to resolve that problem, because otherwise that body will not enjoy the confidence which I hope that it will have.

9.9 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): In some ways I feel as though we should be beginning the debate rather than drawing it to a close. The speech of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) was extremely interesting. He raised a detailed difficulty which is well known to those of us who have dealt with highlands and islands affairs. I regret that he will not be a member of the Standing Committee to carry on these discussions. Nevertheless, I hope and expect the Committee to address the matter in as much detail and with as much careful analysis as he did. At the end of the day, his conclusion on clause 11 is wrong, but the spirit of what he said was interesting.

I welcome the creation of this agency and I endorse much of what the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) said. I, too, approach this with a fair degree of enthusiasm. This is a new chapter and it provides a tremendous chance for the slate to be wiped clean and for attitudes to develop afresh in areas of Scotland where the relationship between conservationists and land users has not always been particularly happy. It is a real opportunity for a fresh start. Like the hon. Gentleman, I thought that the speech that Magnus Magnusson made on Skye in which he set out his vision for Scottish Natural Heritage was encouraging and stimulating. I have no doubt that, as the script continues to be written, the new body will develop and flourish within the framework that we shall lay down in this legislation.

It is essential to clarify clauses 5 and 11 early on. I do not want to make too much of this. If we have been slightly misled by an omission from the Secretary of State's opening speech and if at an early stage in Committee the Government say that this is much ado about nothing and that they will maintain the position taken by Lord Strathclyde when the amendments were first moved, that is fine by me. I do not want to set hares running unnecessarily. Nevertheless, it is necessary for that to be said more unequivocally than it has been said tonight. I rather suspect that the Government are beginning to hedge their bets and that some sort of bogus compromise will be produced in the next few weeks.

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

Many hon. Members have referred to what the amendments would do, but it is important to note what they say. I shall deal first with the amendment moved by Lady Saltoun of Abernethy in respect of clause 5. She successfully proposed that any proposal for a site of special scientific interest by Scottish Natural Heritage should have to be given in writing to owners and occupiers of the land concerned and to the local planning authority, and then there would be an appeals procedure to the Secretary of State, the details of which would be brought to the House. In what I regard as an additional piece of cheek, or the icing on the cake, subsection (3B) of the amendment states:

"Any statutory instrument made under subsection (3A) above shall be subject to affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament."

That is a nice little circular ploy. The House of Lords tables an amendment to create an appeals procedure, motivated, as was made clear in the voting lists, by landowners' dislike—I put it no more strongly—of the Nature Conservancy Council and SSSIs. The procedure provides that, every time an SSSI is designated, it must go to the Secretary of State. Then, if they do not like the result, there is a further stage in the proceedings in that the matter would have to return not only to this House, but to the House of Lords, where precisely the people who put the procedure in place, for the motivation that we all understand, would have the power of veto. I do not see for one moment how anyone can take such a proposition seriously.

I was interested to note from Lady Saltoun's remarks the horror with which she viewed the proposals. I could not do her justice if I did not quote——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. It is not in order to quote a Member of the House of Lords other than a Minister.

Mr. Wilson: I accept that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall paraphrase what she said. She said that to create a body such as Scottish Natural Heritage without there being a right of appeal against its diktats was unacceptable, undemocratic and worthy only of regimes such as Saddam Hussein's. As a flight of rhetorical fancy, that takes a bit of beating.

The Bill has been discussed in another place by charabanc-loads of highland landowners who came down to push through their vested interests, but they then complain that the legislation that they are considering is undemocratic and unacceptable and that such practice is comparable to Saddam Hussein. I do not know how he elects the members of his Parliament, but I know a little about how Lady Saltoun of Abernethy comes to be here. In 1445 one of her forebears, Sir Laurence Abernethy, was created Lord Saltoun. Anyone who has not stood for election between 1445 and 1990 and still has a season ticket to what, in absurd theory, is the upper legislative Chamber in the land, has a bit of a brass neck to talk about democracy.

For the interest of the House, during my important researches, I found that the arms of Lady Saltoun of Abernethy include an ostrich holding in its beak a horseshoe proper, doubtless protected under the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch is an altogether more modern creature. In fact, I could not find him in "Debrett's Peerage" because he was invented only in 1990. Lord Pearson of Rannoch——

Mr. Home Robertson: Is that as in Rannoch moor?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, as in Tummel and Loch Rannoch. He lives in Rannoch barracks, presumably under detention. He is up to his oxters in vested interests, as all those people are. He is responsible for the present clause 11 about which we have heard so much tonight.

It is important to state what clause 11 would do. It would cripple the new agency which the Government, no doubt with good and constructive intent, are setting up and which is supported, by and large, by the Opposition with good and constructive intent. The clause would bring the agency into being and then ensure that, for the first X number of years, it must do precisely what the old agency has been doing for eight years—go around the same SSSIs to designate them all over again.

I have not the slightest doubt that these are, and are intended to be, wrecking amendments to undermine the powers and potential of Scottish Natural Heritage from the day it is born. It is worth noting that those people in another place who supported the amendments own literally millions of Scottish acres. They include Lord Margadale, a well-known figure in Islay and well known to the NCC and other bodies as the owner of an estate notorious for decades for the ruthless killing of wild birds. They also include Lord Burton, the brewer's boy, of whom we have heard something.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to stand here making outrageous accusations against those in another place, to which they have no chance to respond and which are wholly untrue, defamatory and wrong?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is contrary to our conventions to criticise Members of another place in that manner. The hon. Gentleman should temper his remarks.

Mr. Wilson: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those in another place are not blate in criticising Members of this House and the civil servants who are doing——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not seek to debate my ruling; he must observe it.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall simply name them: Lord Margadale, Lord Burton, Lord Vestey—the Vestey peerage was bought in the days of Lloyd-George, which is how he can go to the other place and represent his interests—Lord Dulverton and Lord Kimball, a noted Sutherland landowner. The whole lot of them lined up to vote for clause 11. What surprises me is that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland should associate himself in any way with these wrecking amendments.

I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman said about land users, but that is a different question altogether. I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Gentleman's views on such matters, but the House of Lords Members who put forward these wrecking amendments think that they are on to a populist cause that will attract support from people whose motives are different from and better than, the ones by which they are guided. That is the trap that is being set. By all means let

us, in Committee, table amendments and new clauses of our own with a view to achieving a better solution in the interests of land users. But I am not prepared to build a good and well-motivated solution on the basis of badly motivated wrecking amendments made in the other place. The Liberal Democratic party would do well to follow that example and not get mixed up with some of the landowning interests in the highlands, especially in Caithness and Sutherland.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that there is not in the upper House a voice, other than the voices of those who have been appointed or have inherited their titles, to take care of the point about which I am concerned—the lack of a democratic mechanism. What mechanism does the hon. Gentleman propose? I think that we are entitled to know.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman has twice said that there are no crofters in the upper House. That is precisely why this is such a mockery. These people are representative of no one and nothing. Labour Members are not prepared to be guided by amendments that were inserted to serve different interests. We shall table our own amendments in Committee and in the House. Our solutions will be motivated by concern for the interests of land users—concern that the hon. Gentleman expressed, and that I share. That is a very different matter.

We hope to use this Bill in the most constructive possible way as a kind of "Rural Affairs (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill"—if that does not strike too much terror into the hearts of those who dealt with the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill 1985. A wide range of issues could usefully be debated during the passage of the Bill. There will be no attempt to delay its passage, but there are matters in respect of which there is plenty of room for constructive debate.

For instance, there is the whole question of the use of land management grants in relation to environmental issues. This was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). Despite what the hon. Member for Dumfries said about a welcome increase in hill livestock compensatory allowances, clearly there is a trend towards a general policy of moving agricultural subsidy away from headage payments and towards direct support for the people who live on and work the land. We could usefully give Scottish Natural Heritage the option of introducing a pilot scheme in that direction.

As has been said, Scottish Natural Heritage should certainly have a duty to make comments to the Secretary of State on forestry proposals outside, as well as within, sites of special scientific interest. Such applications should go to local authority planning committees and the new agency should then have a duty to comment on them, with a right of appeal to the Secretary of State. Similarly, we believe that marine developments are suitable for the attention of the new agency. The principles of local authority planning should be extended to inshore waters, and Scottish Natural Heritage should have a duty to comment on them, with a right of appeal to the Secretary of State. One consequence would be to move control of fish farming developments away from the Crown Estate commissioners.

On another marine theme, it is widely felt in environmental circles in Scotland that the new agency must have a duty to advise the Secretary of State on shipping movements. I am thinking particularly of the difficult issue of the passage of oil tankers through the Minch, where the biggest environmental disaster in Scotland is possibly waiting to happen. It would, to say the least, be an anomaly if the new environmental agency operating in Scotland had no right to comment on that. In Committee, we shall suggest that it should have a duty to comment on such matters.

It would be a sensible and non-political initiative if the functions and duties of Scottish Natural Heritage were to include the promotion of environmental education in co-operation with local authorities. The purpose of that proposal would be to enhance the status of the new agency's educational remit, which the Opposition see as crucial to the aim of enhancing environmental awareness in Scotland.

I hope that the Committee will have an opportunity to discuss the traditional right to roam over Scottish hills and mountains. We may propose that the new agency alone should have the power to restrict access, and then only on environmental grounds, thus removing the ability of landowners to deny public access. That would give a sound basis for a debate on that controversial issue, which commands a great deal of interest. We intend to ensure that, in Committee, there is a debate on the concept of national parks, unless the Government bring forward a clause or amendment of their own, which we would welcome.

It is obvious from the speeches tonight that there is no broad agreement. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) gave strong support to the concept of national parks, particularly in the context of Loch Lomond. In other parts of Scotland there is support for national parks. The debate has already been bedevilled by the term "national parks", which we must discuss in Committee. The opposition view is that there are regions of Scotland that require special management arrangements, particularly where a number of local authorities is involved. Certainly there is no blanket solution, and different districts will require different arrangements. The guiding principles should be the promotion of increased access, democratic local involvement and the promotion of conservation and sustainable development.

We shall table amendments in relation to Nirex, as did Lord Carmichael of Kelvingrove in the other place. He introduced amendments on importing nuclear waste into Scotland and the creation of a repository for——

Mr. Bill Walker: I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman refer to amendments moved by one of his noble Friends in another place. Did he think that the amendments of the Lord to whom he referred were all right? If so, it seems that the hon. Gentleman is showing his prejudices.

Mr. Wilson: As any democrat will understand, we do not apply subjective judgments about whether things are right or wrong: we measure whether the people moving the amendments represent a public interest or a vested interest and whether they are there as a result of something approximating a democratic process or through hereditary rights and birth. Any democrat will recognise those distinctions; Opposition Members, and some Conservative Members, have no difficulty in doing so.

We shall certainly table amendments on nuclear waste, and various aspects of land ownership and use. There is

[Mr. Wilson]

much to be discussed in the context of the Bill. There are many ways in which the new agency can be strengthened. It has our good wishes, and we approach its Committee stage in that spirit.

9.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) welcomed the Bill with a fair degree of enthusiasm and said that it represented a fresh start.

The theme of the debate was taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who said that conservation would ride on the crest of a wave —words that he attributed to Dr. John Francis, an exceptionally able official who gives the strongest support to Mr. Magnus Magnusson. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries said that there was the will, the resources and the vision. He particularly spoke about a greater responsiveness. In their maiden speeches, the hon. Members for Argyle and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) made remarkably similar comments. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries that it would be nonsense to renotify all SSSIs in Scotland. I will deal with clause 11 in a moment.

I much enjoyed the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans), especially the argument that they advanced in favour of research. Scottish Natural Heritage will certainly carry out research. My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West mentioned the problem of trees causing acidification. The Government are spending many millions of pounds on research into that subject, and that research will continue. His comments on the reintroduction of wolves were not so far-fetched as they might have sounded. That possibility was investigated but rejected before it reached me. Ministers certainly would not have approved it. It is a serious point, because species reintroduced by the NCC have played a key role.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East said, the Government will not act as a poodle —neither Mr. Balfour's nor anybody else's. The role of changing communities must be recognised by Scottish Natural Heritage, and I am sure that it will be.

There is much misunderstanding about the subject of SSSIs and the procedures for notification and for consent for change of use, which has led for calls for review and a right of appeal. An amendment was successfully moved in another place, contrary to the Government's wishes, and now forms clause 11. The current SSSI system was established under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries introduced. That allows Great Britain to meet its obligation on habitat protection and to strengthen protection of regional and nationally important sites. It has operated consistently throughout Great Britain, notwithstanding the creation of the three separate nature conservation bodies under part VII of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The House should be aware, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries said, that an SSSI is identified on the basis of its scientific interest. The NCC recognises that the decision on the scientific interest of an area is a matter of opinion. As such, therefore, it is not a suitable matter for the Secretary of State to arbitrate on. The practice is that he undertakes such a role where there is a conflict between different interests, rather than where there is a need to arbitrate between two scientific opinions. Once the NCC has identified the scientific interest in an area, it has a duty to notify that interest to owners and occupiers, local authorities and the Secretary of State. Any of those notified can object to the scientific reasons for notification, so there is already a right of appeal to the NCC.

I should stress that SSSI notification simply highlights the scientific interest of the site to ensure that full consideration is given when any change of use is proposed by owners, occupiers or third parties. Development proposals for SSSIs under the general development order are dealt with through the planning system which, as the House will appreciate, has standard procedures for appeals and arbitration. Other proposals to change activity on an SSSI are dealt with through the listing of potentially damaging operations by the NCC. The procedures, as set out in the 1981 Act, allow full compensation and arbitration where a section 29 conservation order applies, and for an appeal to the Secretary of State.

Therefore, notification does not impose restrictions on land use; rather, it triggers procedures, including appeals, for dealing with proposed changes in use. The system does not give the NCC an absolute veto over land use, but provides merely a means of ensuring that due regard is given to the scientific interest of the site when any change of use is proposed.

Mr. Bill Walker: I said that the Civil Aviation Authority was a statutory body with a system similar to that set out in the Bill, but without clause 11—which I support. One appeals to the CAA against its own decisions. It took me six years to get an airway moved that should never have been there in the first place. The CAA thought that it knew best but it did not.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I note the case that my hon. Friend mentions, but the NCC is not in a comparable position. Much more user-friendly procedures should be adopted, and that is generally recognised. In future, the NCC will talk about "operations requiring consultation" rather than "potentially damaging operations".

In a letter dated 18 January, Magnus Magnusson makes it clear that the regional boards being established by the NCC will be the first level of decision-making. The letter states:

"They are to be established in order to improve local accountability and sensitivity of administration on a whole range of environmental initiatives and case work including, of course, SSSI designation. The members of these boards will be expected to work closely with staff members visiting potential SSSIs to help iron out problems, giving friendly advice where required and applying their personal knowledge of the area."

Mr. Dewar: It would be indiscreet to press the Under-Secretary of State when his senior colleague has remained silent. Clause 11 as drafted falls into two parts. No hon. Member has referred to clause 11(1), which refers to the five-year review period of all SSSIs. The second half of the clause refers to a right of appeal. The Minister has said that he does not see any reason for a right of appeal to be written in and thinks that it should be done by

voluntary good practice. He quoted Mr. Magnusson's letter as evidence that that is now in train. The Secretary of State has said that there is to be some sort of replacement for clause 11, some area of compromise. I shall not embarrass the Minister by asking for details, but can he tell us in what area that compromise will be placed?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend did not go as far as that: the hon. Gentleman is reading into my right hon. Friend's speech a statement that he did not make.

I have been asked about review procedures and the right of appeal. The Government are not against Scottish Natural Heritage reviewing sites of special scientific interest. It has been the practice of NCC periodically to review sites. My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West mentioned this matter. In the past 10 years the NCC has had to consider all sites notified under the 1949 Act in the light of the provisions set out in section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It has therefore reviewed all sites and decided whether a site should be renotified in its original or amended form, both in terms of the area covered and therefore the site boundaries, and the activities that would be permitted within the site if the scientific interest were to be maintained.

This substantial renotification process is now virtually complete. In Scotland, 97 per cent. of the sites notified under the 1949 Act have been renotified. To undertake the review process all over again would be totally impractical. It would be a misuse of the resources that we provide to the NCC and would divert staff effort away from the positive tasks that we intend for Scottish Natural Heritage.

Clause 11(1) is also impractical, as it would require Scottish Natural Heritage staff to divert the majority of its resources to the review of sites because clause 11 provides that a review has to be completed within five years. It would be much more practical for such a review to be carried out as a rolling programme and on a non-statutory basis, as already occurs.

Clause 11(1) and (2) contain some technical flaws. First, it is implied that no sites designated after the appointed date in clause 13 will be subject to the review procedures. Those procedures will apply only to those sites that have been notified up until that date. Furthermore, the subsection implies that the review would be undertaken on only one occasion. Are we to take it that, once the review is complete and decisions have been made, there will be no further reviews of the SSSIs by the SNH? That would be a far less practical procedure than the present review process.

A further technical flaw is that the subsection tries to give statutory force to the non-statutory code of guidance that the NCC has drawn up in consultation with the Secretary of State. Subsection (2) could also be read to imply that, following the review, the SNH would recommend either continuation or withdrawal of the notification. On that basis, it would not give scope for amendment of the SSSIs to take into account the changed circumstances such as reinterpretation of the scientific interest or a development that had taken place in the notified area. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East that changing circumstances have properly to be taken into account.

I shall deal now with the appeals procedure.

Mr. Dewar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: I may be able to satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: If the hon. Gentleman asks me a question, I shall answer him. He asked earlier whether there had been a cock-up or a conspiracy on the part of the Government in relation to the right of appeal on SSSIs. The answer is neither. My noble Friend the Minister in the other place made it clear that the Government did not support the amendment either in principle or in the detailed drafting. I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance that the Government had no involvement in the drafting of the amendment.

I shall deal now with the right of appeal, about which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) wanted to know. This right is set out in subsections (3), (4) and (5). The proposal for a right of appeal appears to misunderstand the statutory procedures laid down in the 1981 Act. These are fundamental to the way that the system operates, and I have already outlined the system.

In effect, the Secretary of State would have to decide on every case after obtaining advice from an independent scientific advisory committee. This could fetter or compromise his role in other relevant decisions, particularly in his quasi-judicial role as planning Minister for Scotland. For example, in planning cases the NCC has a formal right of objection to the Secretary of State in respect of a subsequent planning application within an SSSI. The decision to approve the notification of an SSSI following an appeal might be seen as prejudicing his discretion in determining whether any subsequent planning application should go ahead. In effect, his agreement to the SSSI notification would be perceived by some as confirming that nature conservation has primacy within that site.

There are also considerable practical problems with the subsections. The right of appeal procedures proposed by the amendment would be costly and would require a new level of bureaucracy to make judgments on a body that had been set up by Parliament with a specific statutory duty. There is no sign of what would happen between a recommendation by the SNH and the Secretary of State deciding whether the site should continue to be notified or whether the notification should be amended or revoked. During this period of uncertainty, one assumes that the previous notification and all other relevant arrangements such as consented activities and management agreements, as well as compensation arrangements would be processed or ignored.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) as I have already given way several times to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Mr. Maclennan: The remarks that the Minister has made in the past few minutes will be read with consummate care by those of us who are concerned about these matters. Can he square what he said about the finding of the SNH being merely a matter of opinion with his treatment of it as though it were a judgment that the Secretary of State had to incorporate in his subsequent

[Mr. Maclennan]

thinking about planning matters? Surely the Secretary of State can take account of new factors in a planning matter that may arise, and which should override an earlier decision that he has reached.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The House must appreciate that notifications are made primarily on scientific grounds. It must be borne in mind that at present the NCC has few sanctions against potentially damaging operations. Indeed, its only sanction is to take court action, and if successful that would be followed by a fine.

We shall take into account what the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) have said. They commented on a major issue that is raised in the Bill and it will require careful consideration in Committee. Clause 11, as drafted, is technically defective, impracticable and unacceptable.

Mr. Dewar: The Minister has made what I think could fairly be described as a comprehensive condemnation of clause 11. He has buried it and then danced on its grave. If he rules out the statutory review procedure suggested in the clause and the attendant appeal, has he any sympathy with the argument that, whatever may be the fate of the right of appeal that the clause provides, there is a need for some right of appeal, and that that should be introduced into the machinery?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until we discuss these matters in Committee. When we do so, I shall develop any further thoughts that I can put before the Committee. More user-friendly procedures must be involved.

The hon. Member for Garscadden referred to archaeological needs. Scottish Natural Heritage will work closely with the Historic Buildings and Monuments Directorate, as the NCC has in the past. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) asked me about local representation. Regional boards will be appointed by the chairman and main board of the SNH and will fully represent the wide range of local interests that will have to be taken on board. Clause 3 states that the interests of local communities will be taken into account. That matter was raised by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked me to apply the logic of Wittgenstein in defining sustainability. Wittgenstein came to the famous conclusion:

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereon one must remain silent."

I shall, however, attempt to respond to the hon. Gentleman. Some doubts have been expressed about the meaning of the concept of sustainability in clause 1, which will be vital to the activities of the SNH. I shall emphasise the importance of the concept. We believe that we are the guardians of the heritage of our successors and that we must seek to manage that heritage extremely well. In the words of the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher),

"We do not hold the freehold on our world but only the full repairing lease."

As the consultation paper says, we should not be sacrificing tomorrow's prospects for marginal and illusory gains today. We have a moral duty to look after our planet and hand it on in good order. Those concepts are fundamental to our understanding of sustainability. I think that that is clear.

Mr. Dewar: If that is the vital concept, the Minister will have given a great deal of thought to its definition. Will he attempt to define it briefly for us?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sustainability means that natural resources must be managed in such a way that they can be handed on to our children and to our childrens' children in a form in which they are undiminished and, if possible, enhanced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North asked about the headquarters of the SNH. The two existing headquarters at Hope terrace, Edinburgh and Battleby, Perthshire are candidates. I noted everything that my hon. Friend said. Management consultants are taking up the issue. They will advise and their final report will be lodged in the Library. We take seriously what my hon. Friend has said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West asked about the relations of the Caravan Club with the Countryside Commission. I have no doubt that the club is sensitive when it comes to the siting and appearance of caravan sites. We expect that it will continue to adopt that approach and that it will have good relations in future with the SNH.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North talked about skiing. We are considering the format of revised planning guidelines which will reflect and take account of the need for developments to act in harmony with the environment. If the hon. Member for East Lothian visits some of the ski centres in Scotland, he will find that that has been effectively achieved.

As to access provisions, a major review is being undertaken by the countryside commission, and we look forward to the detailed report that it will submit in due course. We will consider any proposals for legislative change in the light of its findings.

I will take into account the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries. He is a former Minister for Sport, and I assure him that we believe that Scottish Natural Heritage should be the strategic body to advise not only on access but recreational use. We believe also that tourism will increase substantially in the future.

As to national parks, the commission is currently analysing the comments made on its report, and its members are meeting tomorrow to discuss the results of the consultation exercise and to reach a viewpoint. We expect that the commission will advise us of the outcome by mid-March. Once we have that information, we will consider its proposals and will, in the light of the many submissions that we have received, make a response speedily thereafter.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: As the Under-Secretary of State expects the commission to report by mid-March, will right hon. and hon. Members have an opportunity to discuss that report, not only in Committee but on the Floor of the House? That matter is one that seriously concerns many people throughout Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It will be competent for the report to be discussed under the terms of the Bill, not least because the Government intend to table an amendment to create a new designation of natural heritage

areas. A new one is needed because existing designations are limited either to nature conservation purposes or to landscape purposes only. Natural heritage areas will be designed to bring about the conservation and enhancement of landscape and nature, together with greater understanding and enjoyment of them. That integrated designation is entirely in keeping with the purposes of SNH. However, that does not pre-empt a decision on national parks.

Mr. Dewar: As a natural heritage area will be a designation, presumably it will embrace a strategic plan that must be implemented. Will a body be established to implement that plan, or will that responsibility fall to some other body already in existence or to be created, such as in the case of a national park?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We intend to wait until we receive the countryside commission's representations before reaching our final conclusions. That does not pre-empt a decision being reached on national parks, but all designations must be taken into account if amendments to the Bill are to be made. I am aware from the responses that we received that the proposal for a national park in the Ben Nevis/Glencoe area has generated little or no interest. In the case of Wester Ross, there is strong and united opposition, and a strong dichotomy of opinion exists in respect of a national park for the Cairngorms. However, there appears to be considerable support for the commission's proposals for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs.

Mr. Dewar: Will a new body be required?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The new body that we are creating is Scottish Natural Heritage, which will be very powerful. The hon. Gentleman is rushing ahead. A man must learn to walk before he can run.

In respect of the Cairngorms, we have recommended to UNESCO that they be listed as a world heritage site.

Mr. Dewar: Perhaps I am giving the Minister the credit when I say that he woefully misunderstood my question. I will repeat it. If recommendations are made as to the way in which a natural heritage area's resources and environment should be managed, who will be responsible for implementing them? Will a new body be created for that purpose, or could the area become a national park?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is unlikely that there will be a creation in the form that the hon. Gentleman suggests, but he must wait for the details when the amendment is tabled and is fully discussed. I hope that he will come on to the Standing Committee to discuss it.

The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that we have not consulted on this matter is incorrect. In the consultation paper, on page 14, it was made absolutely clear that

"there is a case for a more positive, less prohibitive, approach especially in areas which are of the highest natural heritage interest and are subject to change or conflicting usage."

The hon. Member for Garscadden must read the whole of paragraph 9 on page 14, and he will get the entire meaning.

Several of my hon. Friends have mentioned red deer and new conservation powers for the Red Deer Commission. It is undoubtedly the case that we now have some 300,000 deer in Scotland—they have increased enormously over the years—and the Red Deer Commission says that there are 50,000 too many. Obviously each area has its own numbers and its own problems. It has been suggested that the Bill be amended so that environmental interests can be taken into account. At present the Red Deer Commission can only consider damage to agriculture and forestry. We intend to put that right by tabling an amendment which would allow the commission to take action to reduce damage to the natural heritage interest, in the same way that it can when there is damage to agriculture and forestry.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked me whether there was any case for amalgamating the Red Deer Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage. The remit of both bodies are quite different. The commission is responsible for the management of all species of deer, whereas Scottish Natural Heritage has the responsibility to advise on any activity that affects the natural heritage. In addition there are some activities which could not suitably be incorporated in a body concerned generally with conservation, such as the licensing of venison dealers. Therefore, we believe that we have adopted the appropriate course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West and the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) touched upon the impact of forest planting. Both the Countryside Commission for Scotland and the Nature Conservancy Council have undertaken a great deal of analysis and assessment of forestry and have made many valuable proposals for helping to achieve the Government's objective of multi-purpose forestry. We expect Scottish Natural Heritage to build upon that work, and it will have an important role in that connection.

The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) asked me about the legal expertise of the body to be created. I confirm that it will have legal expertise and it will be for it to decide what that expertise should cover and how to acquire it. He also asked about the balancing duty.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. James Douglas-Hamilton: No, I must finish answering the hon. Gentleman's point.

Where the activities of any public body affect land, the balancing duty will be the responsibility of the SNH, but that duty is being amended by the Bill so that it takes account of the concept of natural heritage, as defined in clause 1 of the Bill.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries said about the difficulties about marine consultation areas. Indeed, Loch Sween marine nature reserve is being considered by the NCC, which is consulting on proposals. As the hon. Gentleman knows there has been considerable opposition in that case. We are aware of that, but it is for the NCC to respond to the opposition. At this stage there is no Government involvement. We believe that protection of the marine ecosystem will grow in importance and the SNH will have a leading role to play.

As regards the reasons for merger, the overwhelming majority of responses that we received were strongly in favour of the merger taking place in the form of a much more powerful environmental body in the future. Responses to the consultation paper are available for public scrutiny, and I should like the opportunity to put on record some of the points made. There were a large number of representations in favour of the merger.

[Mr. James Douglas-Hamilton]

This is an admirable Bill, I believe that it has wide support, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

NATURAL HERITAGE (SCOTLAND) BILL [LORDS] [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any administrative or other expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the provisions of that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND ARTS

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Gerald Bowden be discharged from the Education, Science and Arts Committee and Mr. Patrick Thompson be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Mr. Speaker: The motion is debatable.

9.59 pm

Mr. Archie Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to have the opportunity that remains to me——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

ENERGY

Motion made, and Question put,

That Mr. Malcolm Moss be discharged from the Energy Committee and Mr. Cecil Franks be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

HOME AFFAIRS

Motion made, and Question put,

That Mr. Ivor Stanbrook be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Mr. David Sumberg be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

ENVIRONMENT

Motion made, and Question put,

That Mr. Henry Bellingham and Mr. Keith Mans be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Ralph Howell and Mr. Hugo Summerson be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Transport (South-East London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. David Davis.]

10 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise a number of issues concerning transport in south-east London.

Given the dreadful weather that we have experienced in the past few days, I think it appropriate to begin by praising London Regional Transport for its work to keep services running in Greater London, and the local authorities—particularly my borough of Bexley—for their sterling work in clearing and gritting London's roads. However, British Rail services in south-east London last Friday were mixed, and some were very poor. Many local people spent hours waiting for a train and more hours on the train in their endeavours to travel to work and home. Even today, the service was very poor, and the statement by British Rail's director of operations that the problem was caused by the "wrong type of snow" is quite laughable.

The issues that I wish to discuss, however, relate to the local transport network as it affects my constituents—and, of course, those of my colleagues in neighbouring constituencies. I do not intend to criticise the Government or to embarrass my hon. Friend the Minister who, together with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues, is trying to establish an up-to-date and coherent policy for transport in London. Many of my constituents—including me—regret the fact that such a policy is so long overdue.

I intend to highlight a number of the problems caused by the inadequate and poorly co-ordinated transport system that serves Erith and Crayford—problems that cause my constituents frustration and annoyance. They include bus, road, rail and tube services—or, rather, the lack of tube services, given the failure to extend the London underground or the docklands light railway network to our part of London.

I believe that south-east London is the worst served area of Greater London. The fact that it is the only part of London not connected to the underground network reinforces the generally held view that other parts of the capital are far better served. That complaint is frequently made by my constituents. I shall return to the lack of tube services later in my speech.

Of the complaints that I receive from constituents about public transport, most relate to the rail services provided by British Rail's Network SouthEast. I use that service regularly. However, I can neither recommend nor praise it. Many of my constituents are commuters who use the three Dartford-London lines via Greenwich, Bexleyheath and Sidcup. On all three lines there are persistent complaints of unreliable services, frequent cancellations or late running and dirty and overcrowded trains. The ancient rolling stock has single compartments in which many travellers, particularly women, are, quite rightly, unwilling to travel, especially outside the rush hour. There has been the promise of new Networker rolling stock, but to date that is all it seems to be—merely a promise. The new stock should have been operational two years ago. If it had been, the problems of last Friday and today would have been lessened.

I personally count myself lucky. Of the three lines, the one that serves Crayford, the station nearest to my home, is the least troublesome. It is not as good or as bad as lines in other parts of London; it is average to mediocre. However, those of my constituents who live in Erith, Belvedere or Slade Green are not so lucky. Those who use Barnehurst and Bexleyheath stations suffer far more. One constituent told me recently that when he tells people who do not live in the area that he lives in Barnehurst they usually comment, "Oh, I know the place—where the trains never run from." Cancellations on that line are so frequent that people hear about them on the radio every day. Apart from the latest pop tunes on Capital Radio, Barnehurst must be the most well-known name in London.

I appreciate that the Minister is not responsible for operational matters relating to rail services. They are quite properly left to British Rail. However, his Department is ultimately responsible. It is essential, therefore, that he be made aware of just what is going on in our part of London. That is what I am endeavouring to do by means of the debate.

I should like to be able to say that local bus services are in much better shape than rail services, but I can only describe the bus services in my area as poor. In all fairness, the tendering process in my area a couple of years ago was partly successful. Most of the routes transferred to Maidstone Boroline are efficiently operated by a company that uses a well-maintained and modern fleet of buses. However, the same cannot be said for the services run by Bexleybus. That is not an independent operator, as many local residents are led to believe by the change of livery. It is one of the endless string of London Transport subsidiaries.

The changes made by Bexleybus and LRT got off to a poor start a few years ago and never improved. New routes were introduced that were not supported by local people, either as passengers or residents. Users of established routes found that journeys previously completed on one bus now involved at least one change. Residents' views were ignored as quiet residential roads were taken over as bus routes. The problems did not end there. A fleet of ancient, poorly maintained buses, belching fumes and constantly breaking down, staff shortages and other operating problems have all led to the provision of an extremely poor service in our area. It is true that Bexleybus services have improved of late. The number of complaints that I receive is down on the number that were made to me a year ago. However, there is still much to be done. I understand that Bexleybus will give way to another operator for some of the routes.

The tendering exercise caused endless problems, not least because painting the buses a different colour led constituents to believe that the bus services had been privatised. In my view, it would have been far better if they had been privatised, provided that LRT was responsible only for awarding contracts and was not connected with any of the route operators. If that had been the case, LRT would have withdrawn routes from Bexleybus. As it is, my constituents have had the worst of both worlds.

On the roads there is at least some cheer, although the seemingly endless carriageway repairs and alterations on the A2 trunk road make life far from perfect for motorists. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn)—my friend and neighbour—will raise the issue in an Adjournment debate later this week. I am certain that he will cover the salient issues in greater detail.

There is one point relating to the A2 on which I wish to comment. In recent years, the Falconwood-Kidbrooke section of the A2 was completed, vastly improving communications with central London and with the M25. However, travel from my constituency to anywhere north of the Thames other than through central London involves using the Blackwall or Dartford tunnels, which are plagued by frequent closures, lane restrictions and tailbacks, all of which have a detrimental effect on businesses that have located in my area, encouraged by the prospect of good road communications. Those businesses, particularly warehousing and distribution companies located in Belvedere and Thamesmead, were attracted by the proximity of the channel ports and the M25 and the promise of a new local road network linked to an improved Dartford crossing and to the east London river crossing, giving access to the midlands and the north.

Obviously, the new Dartford bridge is nearly completed and will bring welcome relief for users of the M25, although I am concerned about the prospect of the Dartford tunnel's being closed for repairs almost as soon as the bridge opens. However, the delay in proceeding with the east London river crossing is causing most concern among local business men and the business community in my area. There seems to have been an endless string of delays on that long overdue and much-needed scheme—not caused by the Department of Transport, I hasten to add in deference to my hon. Friend the Minister. However, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will make a speedy decision on the bridge design. I hope that he will support the Calatrava design, which would make a worthy and fitting landmark. At any rate, we must have the bridge, and we want the construction to be completed with all possible speed.

Another issue that has caused widespread disappointment, particularly among my constituents in Thamesmead, is the failure to extend either the underground network or the docklands light railway to our side of the river into Thamesmead. As my hon. Friend will know, it was originally intended that the Jubilee line would run to Thamesmead and many people, myself included, are dismayed that that proposal or a realistic alternative has not been implemented.

Thamesmead is a growing community, which is managed by the local people via its own company, Thamesmead Town. It is a unique concept, with a board of directors elected by local residents making all decisions and supported by a first-class team of professionals under the control of the chief executive, Philip Glascoe. Under the company's control, Thamesmead has been transformed into a real town in the making, with sites for business, a new town centre and the construction of homes for sale and rent.

As a community, Thamesmead is poorly served by public transport, particularly in north Thamesmead, where commuters face a long walk or a lengthy wait for a bus to or from Abbey Wood, a British Rail station, to get to or from central London. Thamesmead also has no direct road links to the A2 and M25 or north across the river, and further development of north Thamesmead will be hampered unless transport facilities are improved. It is therefore vital that Thamesmead is linked to the underground or the docklands light railway, and it seems ludicrous that both services will be terminiated just across the river. I urge my hon. Friend carefully to consider those issues.

[Mr. David Evennett]

Transport in the 1990s is a major issue, and there is little point in dwelling upon the wider economic issues such as comparative levels of investment in the past or the need for the country to create wealth to have funds to invest unless the action that is required is made clear. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said last Saturday, we need good public sector services. We need also to look forward. Commuters, shoppers, students, the elderly—all sections of the community—have differing travel needs, but they have a common complaint in my area, they are dissatisfied with the service provided on public transport in south-east London. Excuses and apologies are simply not enough. Hard-pressed commuters returning home after being at work all day do not need the added stress and problems created by late, overcrowded rail services.

For people without a car, shopping by bus in Bexleyheath, Erith market or Crayford should not be a major expedition. But buses, which run on mainly congested local roads, are endlessly late, or short of staff and, therefore, do not run. My constituents want action. They do not expect it overnight, but they expect my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues in the Department of Transport, including the Secretary of State, to give a commitment that action is being and will be taken. They want a commitment that my hon. Friend the Minister and the Department understand and appreciate the transport problems in the area.

It is no good trotting out figures on investment and passenger numbers or giving British Rail statistics. To be blunt, my constituents are not interested in whether more people are using the M4 or whether billions are being spent on rail schemes in west London or the rest of the country. They do not want palliatives from the Minister or the Department on what may happen in 1995 and beyond.

My constituents are suffering at the sharp end now and want to know what will be done to improve the transport system in south-east London. Headlines such as the one in the *Evening Standard* tonight, which said "BR warning as it blames the wrong type of snow", are disgraceful and should never be allowed in a public service.

My constituents expect the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that the services for which the Department is responsible to be efficiently and effectively run, that the east London river crossing is executed with all possible speed, that the extension of the underground or the docklands light railway to Thamesmead is carefully reconsidered, and that money provided by taxpayers and the travelling public is used by the public sector transport authorities—especially British Rail—to provide better services.

I stress that action is vital. My constituents, especially the thousands of captive commuters who have no alternative but to commute by rail, expect action. If that action is not forthcoming, they will feel, justifiably, that the Government have failed them. We must not let them down for they, together with local business and industry, are the wealth creators of Britain. They need good communications to function and function effectively. At present, transport in south-east London is insufficient and ineffective. We look to the Government for action.

10.16 pm

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I congratulate my hon. Friend for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on raising such an important subject in this Adjournment debate. Alas, when he found out that he had obtained the Adjournment debate, he did not know the weather conditions that the country would be suffering. I echo his praise for the local authority workers from Bexley in his constituency to whom he paid tribute for all that they did over the weekend to ensure that people could go about their business. I also pay tribute—although perhaps today is not a good day to do so—to the many manual workers and ordinary workers of British Rail who worked in the most horrendous conditions in an attempt to ensure that a service was operated. That is perhaps a slightly different point from my hon. Friend's operational point about the men who were out trying to sort out the chaotic conditions at the weekend.

As my hon. Friend is aware, Network SouthEast was badly affected last week by frozen trains and rails, which severely restricted the service that it could offer. Over the weekend, I understand that it was able to run a half-hourly service on all three routes from Charing Cross and Cannon street via Dartford. This morning, the picture was worse, with a shortage of rolling stock due to frozen electrics and blown fuses. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made clear comments on that point today during questions.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford for giving me this opportunity to say something about the Government's approach to transport in London and respond to some of his specific points. Unavoidably, I shall give him some statistics, although he says that he does not want them. If the statistics were not as they are and if we had not taken some of the action to which I shall refer, the position would be a great deal worse.

It matters very much to the Government that London should have a good transport service. It is partly a question of ensuring that London maintains its position as a pre-eminent centre of business and finance; but we also want to make London a better place in which to live and work. Good transport to, from and within London is vital to securing both those objectives.

My hon. Friend referred to the improvements to the road network. One of our priorities is to provide good alternative routes for traffic which does not need to go through London. Since 1983, the number of heavy goods vehicles entering London has fallen by 25 per cent., and the number entering central London has nearly halved. My hon. Friend's constituency will have shared in those benefits. To reinforce that welcome trend, we are widening the M25 to increase its capacity. The £86 million partly privately-financed bridge to relieve traffic congestion at the Dartford tunnel is due to open later this year. Remarkable progress is being made with that exciting engineering project. Recently, we published an action plan with proposals for improving the traffic flow on the M25 as a whole.

We have a £1·9 billion programme for improving trunk roads within London over the next 10 years or so. It is not part of our policy to make it easier for commuters to drive

into central London. Our priorities are to relieve the worst bottlenecks and accident black spots and to ensure that London is properly linked with the national road network.

A key scheme in the programme is the east London river crossing, to which my hon. Friend referred. The crossing will greatly improve access to east London and we are giving a high priority to its early construction. As my hon. Friend will know, orders have already been made authorising the construction of the new trunk road. Subject to the satisfactory completion of the remaining statutory procedures, we hope that construction can start in 1992 and that the new road will open in 1996.

Public inquiries into the design of the Thames bridge have recently closed, and we are awaiting the inspector's report. I hope that my hon. Friend will therefore appreciate that, in the circumstances, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of the Department's proposed bridge design or of any alternative design suggested to the inquiries.

Perhaps I can now turn to public transport. My hon. Friend has made some criticisms of London Transport's route tendering system as it has affected south-east London. It may be helpful if I comment briefly on the background to the system.

An important step towards introducing more competition to London was taken by London Buses Ltd., with our active encouragement, when it created 12 subsidiary companies which actually carry on the day-to-day business of operating bus services. The new units, each with a small number of garages, operate more like local bus companies. They are smaller, and they are closer to the local community. Their management are better placed to assess the transport needs of the area and to respond quickly to changes in those needs. Decisions on key issues, such as pay and bus routes, are increasingly being taken at the local level, which is where they should be taken. We intend to privatise those subsidiaries when bus services in London are fully deregulated.

The second step that London Transport is taking to promote competition in the London bus market in advance of deregulation and privatisation is the introduction of route tendering. Under the London Regional Transport Act 1984, LT has a statutory duty to invite tenders for the provision of appropriate services and to accept them where that would be more efficient.

Since tendering began in 1985, it has brought a range of benefits to LT, to LBL and, most of all, to passengers themselves. At present, about 35 per cent. of LT's bus mileage is now contracted out, and the rate of tenders is set to continue at around 5 per cent. per annum. It is worth noting that the performance of the LBL subsidiaries improves when they start operating on tendered routes. That shows that the pressure put on them to perform well and to maintain the high level of service required is forcing LBL companies to raise their standards.

Therefore, tendering provides a valuable driving force for change, by making LBL enter the real world of market forces. Its unit costs are also falling towards that of its competitors: LBL unit costs have reduced by 19 per cent. since 1985-86, and routes on the tendered services operate at a lower cost per mile than the remaining LBL services. Passengers are getting more and better services for less public money, which can only benefit the taxpayer and passenger alike.

As my hon. Friend has said, a large number of bus services in south-east London are now run by independent operators under contract to LT. In particular, the bus network in the Bexley area has recently been re-tendered, and a number of routes, previously operated on a tendered basis by the local LBL subsidiary, have been awarded to independent operators. Although there are often teething problems when a new operator begins running recently won tendered routes, I understand from LT that the routes are now operated using newer vehicles than under LBL and that the disruption to services during the transitional period has been kept to a minimum. The quality of service as monitored by LT's tendered bus unit is satisfactory.

Where a loss of routes results in job losses, it will obviously be traumatic to individuals, but LBL does its utmost to absorb extra capacity within its organisation. I understand that all staff at Bexleybus have been reallocated following the recent tender losses. In some cases, moreover, cost savings arrived at through tendering allow LT to increase operated mileage, which requires more staff and creates extra jobs.

In addition to those measures covering all London bus services, LT can and does monitor closely performance against contract specifications on all its tendered routes. It takes firm action over poor performance. For example, if a contractor operates at less than the specified performance level, he incurs contract penalties. There is no incentive for contractors to cut corners. The ultimate sanction is to take the contract away and replace the contractor with a different operator. That has happened in the past. There is no question of LT allowing tendering to lead to a decline in performance levels. In practical terms, therefore, I think it seems clear that passengers on the LT tendered routes stand a good chance of getting an excellent level of service. The number of contracts to be put out for tender was the subject of a document given to LT under the direction of the previous Secretary of State for Transport.

As LT continues to extend its tendering programme, we have high hopes that the overall level of bus service provision throughout London will continue to improve. I therefore conclude that the bus market in south-east London is now in a more exciting and competitive mode than it has been before. Restructuring and tendering have together led to more flexible and reliable services, which are also responsive to passenger demand.

My hon. Friend also referred to the possible extension of the docklands light railway and the Jubilee line to Thamesmead. As he will know, the process of regeneration of docklands began with the construction of the docklands light railway, which was then seen simply as a catalyst. The scale of development that this stimulated has in turn justified upgrading the railway and extending it to the City. The push further eastwards is being taken forward by the Beckton extension, which will open up the royal docks. The unprecedented scale and pace of development which has been taking place in docklands has so far exceeded all early expectations.

Employment on the Isle of Dogs alone is forecast to rise to at least 90,000, and possibly as much as 150,000, by the end of the century. Docklands will therefore need much greater accessibility to the London commuter market than can be secured via the existing road and public transport network—already under great pressure, as my hon. Friend pointed out—and the docklands light railway. That is why the Government accepted the conclusions of the east London rail study and approved the deposit of the Bill for the Jubilee line extension. It will open up the docklands to

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

a wide catchment area, including Kent and south-east London on British Rail lines into London Bridge; and the east and north-east on lines into Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street via Stratford and West Ham.

As well as supporting the rapid growth in docklands, the new line will also significantly improve accessibility in areas poorly served by public transport south of the Thames, and in the east end in Tower hamlets, Newham and Greenwich. It will satisfy a necessary precondition for the timely and effective regeneration of the Greenwich peninsula. The Government believe that the development of the Greenwich peninsula—primarily for housing—is of considerable strategic importance, as it will help both to ensure the balanced development of east Thames-side and to prevent avoidable use of green belt land to meet forecast housing needs in London as a whole.

In addition to the Jubilee line extension, we have recently approved the deposit of a private Bill to allow the private sector to extend the docklands light railway to Greenwich and Lewisham and thus provide another much-needed river crossing and allow regeneration to spread to Greenwich and Lewisham.

The Government have therefore presided over an unprecedented expansion of public transport into south-east London. Of course I appreciate my hon. Friend's particular concerns on behalf of his constituents in Thamesmead, and I therefore realise that he would like me to go further. The east London rail study included an evaluation of a further extension of the Jubilee line through the royal docks to Woolwich and possibly Thamesmead. It concluded, however, that this would not, at the present time—I stress that—be justified, as the additional costs substantially exceeded benefits.

However, mindful of our experience that success builds on success, we have ensured that such a further extension of the line is not ruled out. Accordingly, an underground junction will be incorporated into the Jubilee line extension, south of Canning Town, to safeguard the possibility of a future extension to Woolwich and Thamesmead without disrupting the existing railway. Furthermore, the London Docklands development corporation and London Transport are currently embarking on a further study into the ways of improving transport into the royal docks and beyond. I am sure that my hon. Friend will therefore appreciate that his concerns have not only been recognised but anticipated.

Finally, my hon. Friend raised the question of rail services to his constituency. If I do not have enough time to answer my hon. Friend, I shall write to him. I said earlier that it was no part of our policy to encourage car commuting to central London. That is why the Government are supporting record levels of investment in Network SouthEast, as well as in London Transport. Network SouthEast plans to invest £1·3 billion over the next three years. That is an increase of 10 per cent. in real terms over the already high level of investment in the past three years. Having said that, I am very much aware that there are problems at times with the rail services which serve south-east London and north Kent. However, I can assure my hon. Friend——

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Development Board for Rural Wales Act 1991

Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Act 1991

Statutory Sick Pay Act 1991

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SMITH KLINE & FRENCH LABORATORIES, AUSTRALIA, AND MENLEY & JAMES, AUSTRALIA BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Truancy

1. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action is being taken to reduce rates of truancy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): My right hon. and learned Friend is providing grant of £6·5 million for projects in 31 local education authorities to improve attendance in designated schools. We shall shortly be issuing to local authorities and others guidance on education supervision orders which the Children Act 1989 will provide from October.

We are considering whether further measures are necessary.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that detailed and helpful response. Does he think that local education authorities are playing their full part in ensuring that children attend school and, when they reach school, stay there? Will my hon. Friend consider publishing a table by local education authorities to show truancy levels?

Mr. Fallon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children turn up at school. Local authorities have the power to prosecute, but not all of them appear to do so, although they should. I shall consider publishing a table. We need better information and parents and the public are supposed to know which local authorities are performing properly.

Miss Lestor: Is the Minister aware that questions that I have tabled asking for a national assessment on truancy have not been answered, on the basis that the Government do not collect those statistics nationally, so there is no clear picture of the problem? Does he agree that one of the biggest problems is that many youngsters who play truant —it is estimated that there are about 100,000 at any one time—work illegally, often because of unemployment in the area or for other reasons? That problem needs urgent attention.

Mr. Fallon: On the first part of the hon. Lady's question, we are considering whether we can collect and publish the figures on a national basis. At present, they are not collected or published uniformly by the local education authorities. On the second part of the hon. Lady's question, she is right that there is a link between truancy and criminality. It is, therefore, important to ensure that more pupils turn up at school.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Is my hon. Friend aware that some parents do not know that their children are playing truant from school? Will he ensure that everything possible is done by schools and others to ensure that parents are informed immediately absences are noted and are encouraged to do everything they can to take responsibility for their children's future attendance in education?

Mr. Fallon: My hon. Friend makes a good case for further guidance, which should include reminding parents of their responsibilities and ensuring that the school informs them as quickly as possible.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister confirm that he has no evidence of the pairing system operating in schools in Britain? Is he aware that if there were a pairing system called "organised truancy" and the rates were as bad as they are for voting in the House of Commons, the attendance rate in schools would be less than 50 per cent? The truth is that there is not a school in Britain with less than 80 per cent. attendance.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the definition of truancy. We shall have to consider whether the regulations need to be clarified to distinguish between absence that is justified—the child may be sick or have a good reason for being absent—and the sort of unauthorised absence that the Patronage Secretary might recognise.

Grant-maintained Schools

2. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have achieved grant-maintained status.

10. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have become grant maintained since the passing of the Education Reform Act.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Fifty schools are now operating as grant-maintained schools compared with 20 this time last year. My predecessor and I have approved a further 10 applications.

Mr. Norris: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Does he agree that grant-maintained status is ideal for mature and well-managed schools that want and deserve greater control over their affairs and that local management of schools has proved to countless head teachers just how popular the concept is? Is not it extraordinary that the Opposition apparently want to deny that greater freedom of choice to schools, parents and pupils?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. Mr. Simpson, the headmaster of Wilson's school, Sutton, has said that grant-maintained status is an unqualified success and he is happy with it. He and many other heads are finding that being in proper control of their schools is an exciting prospect. Grant-maintained status is popular with staff and parents and many of those schools are heavily over-subscribed with applicants. Following the success of the first grant-maintained schools, many more will apply for that status. I share my hon. Friend's belief that it is extraordinary that the Labour party should still be organising such persistent campaigns in defence of nothing more than local authority bureaucracy.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I welcome the expansion in grant-maintained schools, which is due to their popularity with parents, but will my right hon. and learned Friend reflect on the fact that in opposing grant-maintained schools and almost every other choice in education, including the independent sector, city technology colleges and grammar schools, the Labour party is really telling parents, "You will get what we deign to give you and, effectively, there will be no choice whatever"?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Labour party has consistently opposed giving more autonomy and independence to the management of individual schools, thereby opposing schools becoming more responsive to parents and the local community. Its attitude towards the assisted places scheme and CTCs shows that envy overcomes all appreciation of academic excellence in our schools.

Mr. O'Hara: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the countless numbers of head teachers who have been "delighted" by grant-maintained status is about 50 out of approximately 6,500 eligible in the first year of the scheme? Will he further confirm that it is easy to be delighted by grant-maintained status when one is bribed by the Government to the tune of three, four or in some cases even 10 times the capital expenditure allocation for state schools?

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that another 54 ballots are pending and applications are increasing rapidly. It is indicative of the hon. Gentleman's extraordinary bitterness towards the concept that he uses the term bribery for perfectly sensible funding arrangements. It is extraordinary that he and many of his political friends in local authorities continue to show such bitterness towards local control of schools.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Secretary of State must be honest about the matter. How can he answer the complaints of parents in local education authority schools who, in the Prime Minister's new classless Britain with education at the top of the agenda, know that their schools receive only one third or one quarter of the capital resources of grant-maintained schools? Why do their schools have leaking roofs, unmaintained buildings and a lack of capital while grant-maintained schools get all the money? That is not a classless, equal, fair education system.

Mr. Clarke: I am always honest in my replies here and elsewhere. I seek to maintain my George Washington record in these matters. I accept that often when we consider applications for grant-maintained status we find that the schools have been neglected for many years and we pay particular attention to the capital applications from those schools. The proportion that results is not on the scale that the hon. Gentleman suggests, but when we set up a new, autonomous, grant-maintained school, we should put right the neglect of years and put capital into that school. All that is capital investment in state schools. The capital allocations to local authorities for their maintained schools have been dramatically increased as a result of my predecessor's settlement. There is nothing unfair in what we propose.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the two out of 50 schools in my constituency which have gone for grant-maintained status are delighted that they have done so? They have been able to appoint new staff and broaden their subject areas and they have got away from the dead hand of the bureaucratic Lancashire county council. They can now choose the courses that they want rather than have them foisted on them by bureaucrats.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. She adds to the growing number of examples of schools where the transition has been a great success. It has given a boost in morale to teachers, parents and everybody associated with such schools and that has led to a big increase in applications from all over the country.

Mr. Straw: Is not one reason why, after 12 years of Conservative rule, the British people have less faith in their education system than the people of any other country in Europe have in theirs, the intense and corrupt double standard that the Government operate on the education of the nation's children? Despite what the Secretary of State said, there is bribery to encourage schools to opt out. That is in complete breach of categorical undertakings given by the Secretary of State's predecessors that there would be financial neutrality between the funding of LEAs and grant-maintained schools. As long as this intense discrimination continues, is not it clear that the Prime Minister's conversion to the importance of education is a cynical and hollow sham?

Mr. Clarke: I share fully the public's concern about educational standards and it is important that we improve them. I believe that the public's concern is based largely on their reaction to 20 years of the trendy, left-wing, misguided education policies with which the Labour party and its supporters have been closely associated and still are. We are now introducing a national, broad-based curriculum with a proper system of testing and reporting to parents and introducing local management for schools, which will give real authority to teachers and governors, thereby allowing them to put things right in their schools. The hon. Gentleman cheapens the debate by using words like bribery to describe the financial arrangements. He

does that to disguise the fact that he has nothing to offer to reverse some of the more unfortunate factors of the past 20 years.

Education Policy

3. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent discussions he has had with the teaching unions about education policy.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): My right hon. and learned Friend has frequent meetings with the teaching unions on a wide range of educational policy matters.

Mr. Adley: The Secretary of State referred to the trendy left-wing policies emanating from the Labour party. When my hon. Friend contemplates the advice that his Department receives from the teacher unions about education policy and the weight and merit that he should attach to it, will he bear in mind the fact that 25 per cent. of those who are individual members of the Labour party are also members of teaching unions? Is not this an unhealthy relationship?

Mr. Eggar: I am very interested in the information that my hon. Friend has made available. It goes a long way towards explaining the policies of the Labour party. I have some understanding of the considerable difficulties that the Opposition have, as I, too, am subject to conflicting strands of advice from different teacher unions. The Labour party must find it difficult to reconcile the advice that it has from its paymasters.

Mr. Allen McKay: Does the Minister accept that, when he next goes to the teachers' organisations, he will have to discuss the statement by the Under-Secretary of State that there will be no state-funded schools in three years? Does he also agree that children have the right to have education when they are three years old and that this is what teachers advocate?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend rightly said that all schools will, in future, be able to benefit from control of budgets at local level. We know that there will be better value for money and better provision of education locally, as schools will not have to rely on the artificial levels of bureaucracy suggested by LEAs.

"Management of the School Day"

4. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has regarding the action taken by school governing bodies to implement the DES circular "Management of the School Day".

Mr. Fallon: The circular explained how governing bodies might alter the length of the school day and how they should provide adequate teaching time within the day. Some governing bodies have begun to take action on this—others should do so.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Will he encourage governors to take even more action on this matter? Does he agree that governors have a responsibility to ensure that pupils in schools have options during the school day?

Mr. Fallon: Yes. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that more than a quarter of all primary schools do not yet provide the minimum teaching time. If necessary, we shall have to give statutory force to the circular published last year.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Can my hon. Friend confirm that there is no legal minimum for the length of the school week? Is not that an omission from current educational legislation? Would not it do a great deal more to ensure that poor standards in schools were tightened if he introduced legislation to deal with that?

Mr. Fallon: At present primary school weeks can vary from 20 to 25 hours. Why should parents in one area get less teaching for their children than those in another? Unless schools are prepared to meet the new minimum targets we shall have to consider whether to give them statutory force.

Manchester Council (Capital Allocations)

5. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he received from Manchester city council during 1990 regarding the 1990-91 and the 1991-92 capital allocations.

Mr. Fallon: A delegation from Manchester local education authority and other representatives called on my predecessor on 4 April 1990 and the Department has also received representations in connection with individual projects submitted for the 1991-92 annual capital guideline.

Mr. Bradley: In view of the detailed representations that he has received, how does the Minister justify making a paltry capital allocation to Manchester of £5 million, compared with its realistic bid of £33 million? That decision was described by the chief education officer as a disaster for the education service in Manchester. Does not he understand the anger of parents who cannot get their children into local schools because of lack of investment? Will he receive further representations from me and the education department in Manchester to ensure that in future the Government make a capital allocation which meets the needs of local children rather than at the whim of the Treasury or of Government?

Mr. Fallon: No LEA gets all it asks for. Manchester will get £4·7 million next year, compared with £3 million this year. Manchester would have received more if it had not underestimated the number of sub-standard school places in its bid, if it had bothered to complete the required proposal forms for four further major education building projects when asked to do so and if it had published statutory proposals in respect of the Ducie high school project, which it was advised would be supported and which it has still not done.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my hon. Friend agree that Manchester has below-average education expenditure? Does he find that difficult to justify, considering its high community charge of £425, which is far above the national average?

Mr. Fallon: Yes. It is rather odd that although Manchester's community charge is higher than the average for metropolitan districts, Manchester spends less than half its total budget on education.

History

6. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received any representations about the teaching of history in the national curriculum.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received various representations on the draft order for history in the national curriculum. The statutory consultation process ends on 15 February and I shall take account of all the responses before publishing the final order.

Mr. Illsley: Why has the Secretary of State interfered with the history content of the national curriculum and why has he chosen to focus on the first half of the 20th century? Why will children no longer be able to learn about events of the past 30 to 40 years? Does he accept that those events are of just as much historical importance as other events in history and will he reconsider his decision?

Mr. Clarke: It has been decided that the Secretary of State will lay the orders that determine what should be legally required to be part of the history curriculum and what should, therefore, be the subject of testing when we reach that stage. Having considered the advice of the National Curriculum Council, I have proposed that we should regard the study of history as looking back on events with a reasonable amount of historical perspective and that a distinction should be drawn between history and current affairs. There is nothing to stop pupils talking about important current affairs, but I do not believe that the law should require the study of contemporary events and characters, and examination on those events, as though they were part of the history syllabus.

Sir John Stokes: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, unlike some other countries that either are so new that they have no history at all or, if they have any, are somewhat ashamed of it, we have a long and glorious history which we should offer to all young people?

Mr. Clarke: Pupils will have the opportunity to study our long and glorious British history, together with European history and some aspects of world history. I believe, however, that their study of important events in the Soviet Union, the middle east and other places should end at a point where it is possible to form an historical judgment on events. I have no objection to pupils' talking in the classroom about current affairs, but I do not believe that the law should say that that is part of the history curriculum.

Mr. Straw: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, following a question from me, he was unable to place in the Library evidence to suggest that any political or other bias had been involved in the teaching of modern history —history relating to the past 30 years or so? Does he accept that a good two thirds of GCSE history curricula deal in an historical way with the events of the past 30 years and that that is quite distinct from dealing with them in a current-affairs way? Does he realise that his impulsive decision to exclude that period may overturn two thirds of GCSE curricula and does he accept that people are unlikely to have faith in a national curriculum if they think that it has become simply the partisan plaything of a particular Secretary of State?

Mr. Clarke: I did not give political bias as the reason for my decision; I gave as my reason the need to look at matters in their historical perspective. I believe that the judgments on current affairs that pupils should properly form will be more mature and carry more weight if they are based on a study of the historical background.

For the purpose of history, what is called for is not an examination of the current Gulf war, but—as I suggested in the curriculum—a study of events from the end of the Ottoman empire, taking in the Balfour declaration and the creation of the Hashemite kingdoms, through to the unrest at the time of the mandate, the civil war in 1948 and, finally, the war in 1967. That is the proper subject of the history curriculum; this morning's news on the radio, and current events in the Gulf war, are not. A proper history curriculum with perspective, enabling pupils to view the past and form judgments on it, is the best way for schools to prepare people for making continuing judgments on current events.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is important to teach children hard historical facts and to give them firm dates so that they can relate fact to historical perspective? Is not it time to move away from the child-centred subjective interpretations that we have seen in the classroom so often over the past few years?

Mr. Clarke: I see no point in the study of history unless it is taught in a way that enables the pupil to acquire some knowledge of the factual sequence of events and the activities of the personalities involved. When we move on to the testing of ability and attainment in history, we should pointedly include the testing of historical knowledge. That is not the sole point of education, but it is the essential basis of the understanding of any important subject.

University Education

7. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next expects to meet the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals regarding the future of university education.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr. Alan Howarth): My right hon. and learned Friend and I met representatives of the CVCP on 4 February to discuss a range of matters. We expect to meet them again from time to time, when both immediate and longer-term issues will doubtless be on the agenda.

Mr. Morgan: I thank the Minister for his reply. Can he explain the basis of the extraordinary decision to cut access funds for our higher education institutions to less than half their present level—from £23 million to £10 million in two years time? Does he accept that access funds have been much touted by his Government as a new and flexible instrument and have been extremely useful to the universities? They have been the eye of the needle, with the would-be British higher education student acting as the camel. Why, having built up the funds, does the Minister intend to take away more than half of them over the next two years?

Mr. Howarth: We have introduced new access funds. They will be available for use at the discretion of higher education institutions to help students who may be in

financial difficulties. By convention, the figures for the later years of the public expenditure survey are rounded down to the nearest £10 million. Provision for 1993-94 will be settled following the three-year review that was promised in the 1988 White Paper.

Mr. Rhodes James: Was the strategy of student finance discussed at that meeting and will it be discussed in future, in the spirit of consultation and recognising that this is one of the key problems that we face?

Mr. Howarth: I take my hon. Friend's point about the importance of consultation on the basis of a rational understanding of the requirements of institutions. I am pleased about the exciting and rapid rate of expansion in higher education, right across the board. The rate of expansion has been greater and more creative energy and innovation have been witnessed in recent years in the polytechnics. I have no doubt, however, that the universities will wish to respond. We wish to ensure that the amounts of funding and the funding methodologies are sensibly designed to take account of the needs of universities.

Mr. Andrew Smith: When the Minister meets the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals does he intend to discuss with it the Secretary of State's plans, reported in *The Independent on Sunday*, to abolish the distinction between universities and polytechnics? Will he confirm that the Government are considering that matter? Does he agree that in order to overcome the binary divide it will be necessary to establish a joint funding council, common quality assurance mechanisms and safeguards for the existing research commitments at universities?

Mr. Howarth: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), some of the most vigorous expansion and some of the most creative innovation in higher education have occurred in the polytechnics in recent years. They are impatient to have the right to university status. My right hon. and learned Friend and I are following with great interest the debate which, as the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) recognises, raises complex and far-reaching issues.

Mr. Hannam: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the expansion that has taken place at the excellent university of Exeter and at other universities. When he considers future funding, may I ask him to pay particular attention to the need for funds for the repair and maintenance of the buildings of universities that were created in recent years?

Mr. Howarth: I well understand why my hon. Friend takes such pride in the achievements of Exeter university. We have increased not inconsiderably the sums available for capital expenditure; about £200 million will be available for that purpose. Universities have been provided with considerable discretion and flexibility over borrowing, so Exeter university can look forward with some confidence to being able to provide the necessary facilities to support the expansion in student numbers to which undoubtedly it aspires.

Mr. Molyneaux: Would it not be advisable for the Minister to meet the vice-chancellors in the near future —certainly before completion of the Committee stage of the British Technology Group Bill?

Mr. Howarth: As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), we meet the vice-chancellors from time to time. Among other important matters is the funding of research and how universities can enter into the most constructive and productive relationship with private sponsors of research. I am pleased that university income from industrial and other sources for research has increased fivefold during the time that this Government have been in power.

Parental Interest

8. Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to increase the interest of parents in the education of their children.

Mr. Eggar: The Government have introduced a wide range of measures to extend the part parents play in their children's education, notably by giving parents a much wider choice of schools, by enabling them to seek grant-maintained status for their schools and by increasing the information available to parents on their children's progress.

Mr. Amess: Does my hon. Friend agree that education is very much a partnership between parents and schools and that it is quite wrong for some parents to expect the schools to take total responsibility for their children's education? Does he also agree that the time that parents spend with their children in the evenings and at weekends can in later years pay great educational dividends?

Mr. Eggar: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Many parents spend long periods helping their children. Through our various reforms—including the national curriculum and the reporting mechanism for parents—we shall be assisting those parents. I regret that too many children get stuck in front of the television set as soon as they arrive home from school, that there is too little discussion in the home and that too few books are available. Even the very best teachers and the very best schools cannot effectively educate children in a vacuum.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that parents in Bradford are very interested in their children's education and often take part in campaigns in support of the local authority's requests for more money to restore the city's crumbling schools? Is he aware that there are more than 600 temporary classrooms in use there? Surely it cannot be conducive to the provision of good education that some of those classrooms have been in use for so long that they need radical repair or replacement with more temporary classrooms. Does the Minister agree that it is time the Government accepted the representations from both Conservative and Labour majorities that provision be made for a decent level of education expenditure so that Bradford's crumbling schools may be restored?

Mr. Eggar: Yes, that is why, in this year's settlement, there is a 15 per cent. increase in the capital available to Bradford. That is why many parents in Bradford have voted with their feet, both by supporting grant-maintained status for Bingley grammar school and by making application for a Bradford CTC. They know where good education is to be found.

Non-teaching Staff

9. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to encourage local education authorities to reduce the number of non-teaching staff they employ.

Mr. Fallon: In December we published proposals to require that, by April 1993, control of at least 85 per cent. of a local education authority's potential schools budget should be delegated to the school level. That is where the right decisions will be made.

Mr. Thompson: Is not it a scandal that, out of every 10 education staff employed by local authorities four are in non-teaching jobs? Will my hon. Friend do more to ensure that resources intended for our schools reach their proper destination? Does he agree that local authorities, particularly Labour-controlled authorities, have a poor record in the education of our young people?

Mr. Fallon: Yes. It is quite shocking that, out of their education budgets, authorities such as those in Cleveland and Coventry should make provision for almost as many non-teaching employees as teachers. We have set new requirements. All local education authorities could do more to delegate to the school level, and all should do so before April 1993.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that, however much is delegated to the school level, the main task is to help the teacher in the classroom? Does he agree that the employee ratio—people employed in classrooms, in education offices and in teacher back-up positions—is no measure of efficiency? Does he agree that what we want is proper back-up so that a professional job may be done in the classroom? We need adequate numbers of such people, and we need efficiency. Raw figures are not necessarily any measure of efficiency.

Mr. Fallon: I do not agree. The best judge of the type of back-up that schools need are the heads, the teachers and the governors themselves. It is for them to decide what level, scope and scale of support services are necessary and for them, with their increased budgets, to decide where to purchase such services.

Spelling

11. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made over the introduction of his policy to improve spelling standards in educational establishments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have made spelling a separate attainment target in English in the national curriculum. The systematic testing of spelling as part of the assessment arrangements for English will begin to be phased in from this summer. I am awaiting a response from the School Examinations and Assessment Council to my request that, in marking GCSE examinations, sensible account should be taken of bad spelling.

Mr. Bruce: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that teachers who resist the correction of spelling in subjects other than English do their pupils a great deal of harm? Does he agree that this is indicative, in our teaching system, of educationalists setting the agenda, rather than employers and parents, who are very keen that children should be good spellers? I am a convert—when I was at school I was a diabolical speller—and as an employer I would not take on a secretary who could not even fill in an application form using accurate spelling.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that he is reassured by my experience, since spelling was raised again in my letter to the School Examinations and Assessment Council, that many teachers share his view and mine. The changes that we are making in the national curriculum and to the GCSE—when I get a response from the council—will lead to all schools realising the importance of spelling, which the public want to be part of the systematic teaching of all pupils.

Ms. Armstrong: We welcome the Government's somewhat late conversion to the recognition of the importance of spelling.—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps since the Government have been in office for 12 years, they will discover numeracy next. Why is it that during the past 12 years there has been no research on how to teach spelling effectively and no support to teacher education institutions to ensure that teachers know how to teach youngsters how to spell? What a 12-year legacy.

Mr. Clarke: I am not sure that the subjects of reading, spelling and grammar require much more research than they have already had. They require good practice. Through the national curriculum and the changes that I am proposing to the GCSE, I trust that that good practice will soon come about.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many people believe that spelling was taught effectively in days gone by and that there is no need for more research on how to teach spelling and grammar? Will my right hon. and learned Friend look back a few years and see how it was done then, and remind teachers of the effectiveness of teaching in former times?

Mr. Clarke: I do not usually join in arguments about whether standards have fallen. However, it is the experience of most of us that standards of spelling have dropped in most of the correspondence in which we engage. It is important to tell teachers not how to teach spelling but to underline the importance of it as we introduce the national curriculum and modify the examination system.

Teachers' Pay

12. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make it his policy fully to fund the award by the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions through central Government.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The cost of the Government's proposals for implementing the Interim Advisory Committee's recommendations in 1991-92 has already been fully funded by the Government's decisions made last year on local government expenditure. The 1991-92 education standard spending totals announced last autumn allow for the full cost of these proposals, as well as for the follow-through cost of the 1990-91 teachers' pay award, and also include an element for the exercise of local pay discretions.

Mr. Turner: Why are the Government watering down the award when the IAC—a Government-appointed body—has reported to them that teachers' morale is at rock bottom and that vacancy levels have deteriorated appreciably over the past four years? When will the Government recognise that there is a serious crisis in our education system?

Mr. Clarke: We have accepted in full the recommendations of the Interim Advisory Committee and we are phasing them in. *[Interruption.]* The result will be that by this time next year teachers will have a 9·5 per cent. increase and head teachers will have an increase of over 12 per cent. at a time when inflation is expected by all commentators to be 6 per cent. or below. As a result of this award, teachers will receive a much greater increase in their annual income than other groups are likely to receive in the coming year. That is a good thing. It is especially good that the IAC has introduced new incentives and discretions to enable us to concentrate on classroom performance, shortage subjects and other aspects involved in creating a good career structure for the teachers in our schools.

Mr. Thornton: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that this will do much to improve morale in the teaching profession? Will he look particularly at one of the recommendations of the Select Committee report, which urged that all teacher awards in future should keep pace with inflation and not allow us to return to a position in which we have to have the hikes such as we had under the Houghton and Clegg awards?

Mr. Clarke: As I have already said, everybody expects inflation to fall to 6 or 5·5 per cent. by the end of next year. A general pay increase of 9·5 per cent., with 12·75 per cent. for heads and deputies, is far ahead of inflation. Teachers are already 30 per cent. ahead of inflation during the lifetime of this Government. They have already enjoyed an increase in their real living standards and that will obviously increase substantially as a result of the Government's decisions for next year.

Mr. Fatchett: Can the Secretary of State explain to teachers why, when the Prime Minister says that education is such an important issue and when Conservative Members say that the country is enjoying some form of economic miracle, teachers' pay increases are being "phased", to use the Secretary of State's words? Is not that a further indication that the Government do not value education or teachers?

Mr. Clarke: The Government have phased the increases to take into account the inflation assumptions for the relevant year—next year—and also the pay expectations of other groups in the population. The increase in real terms of teacher's income, which is already 30 per cent. ahead of inflation, will go up substantially next year. The money is being distributed in such a way as to reward especially the good classroom teachers, those in shortage subjects and those who take responsibilities in our education system. The pay award is far ahead of the pay awards likely to go to those in equivalent occupations and it is right that teachers should get that preferential treatment.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 February 1991.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I also called on Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and presented her with a gift from the Cabinet to mark her 90th year. In addition to my duties in the House, I will be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Skinner: It was a cold weather payment.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maclennan: While welcoming the Cabinet's recognition of my constituent, the Queen Mother, in that way *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maclennan: Would the Prime Minister say why, when he came to the House last week to announce the waiver of the exceptionally severe weather payment seven-day condition, he gave no inkling that it was to last 24 hours and that within four days, his Minister for Social Security and Disabled People would announce that things were to go back to where they are now. The "now you see it, now you don't" approach cannot be the way to look after those who are so heavily dependent upon that payment.

The Prime Minister: If there is doubt about that point, let me seek to remove it beyond peradventure at the moment. As I said last week, given the exceptionally severe weather, we wanted to ensure that vulnerable groups would take appropriate steps to keep warm so we waived the seven-day qualifying period. Given the continuation of severe weather since then, we shall once again be waiving the seven-day period. Of course, we shall continue to monitor the situation carefully and if the cold weather continues we shall take similar measures.

Q2. Mr. Evennett: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: While my right hon. Friend was enjoying his much publicised breakfast at the weekend, the people of Lithuania were voting in a referendum. Does he agree that the desire for independence by the Lithuanians, as expressed in the result of that referendum, should be heeded by the Soviet Union?

The Prime Minister: I sympathise very much with my hon. Friend's point. I would like to see the Soviet authorities negotiate with the elected representatives of the Baltic authorities about their aspirations. That is a point I hope to be able to put to President Gorbachev when I meet him next month.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister share our deep concern that unemployment, business bankruptcies and

factory gate prices are all up while investment and output are down? Whose policies does he blame for that—the current Chancellor's or the previous Chancellor's?

The Prime Minister: I think that everyone shares the concern about bankruptcies and unemployment. We also share the considerable degree of pleasure at the growth that there has been in recent years, at the growth in the number of businesses—which, even last year, was running at more than 1,000 a week—and at the prospects that will continue to exist for this country as we increasingly drive inflation downwards.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister understand that he has taken many of those new businesses—and longer-established businesses—straight into slump with his policies? Why will he not now cut interest rates, use a more sensible system of managing demand and try to stop the slump now, before the damage gets even worse and goes on for even longer?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should know that the generalised slogans that he uses simply will not do. Let me quote to him what even *The Guardian* said of the alternatives:

"As for the Opposition parties, their call for interest rate cuts with no accompanying recognition of the economic realities is politically opportunistic and economically naive."

I agree with *The Guardian*.

Mr. Kinnock: May I put it to the Prime Minister that, this very week, factory gate prices are up, unemployment will be up and bankruptcies are up? Is that what he intends to continue to do? If so, I put it to him that his policies are hurting just about everyone and working for just about no one.

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman will find that our policies are working. I believe that that will become increasingly apparent. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the rise in output prices. I must say that I think that that is a suspect figure. In any event, the January figure may well reflect the delayed and continued impact of the autumn increase in oil prices. Throughout this year, the right hon. Gentleman will see a continuing fall in the rise of inflation.

Mr. Rowe: Although at this moment it may seem bizarre to imagine that there could be advantages in transferring from road to rail, will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in better times, when the Department of Transport appraises capital projects it allows for both freight and passenger savings on roads?

The Prime Minister: In so far as I could hear the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I believe that I agree with him. British Rail has a substantial investment level at present; indeed, it is the highest level for 30 years. As the former chairman said not long ago:

"the investment programme is about the maximum rate we can physically manage."

Q3. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fisher: Is not the Prime Minister ashamed that an estimated 50 young homeless people are sleeping rough on the streets of Stoke-on-Trent? They are not eligible for his severe weather payments or his emergency aid. What place is there for them in his classless society?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, on a number of occasions I have expressed my concern and outlined the action that we are taking to deal with the position of young people who are sleeping rough. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning set out some policies some time ago and explained that a considerable amount of resources would be devoted to implementing them. One of the problems that is recognised and acknowledged by the voluntary groups—if not, perhaps, by every hon. Member—is that some of those who sleep rough have every option to go into shelters but frequently do not exercise it.

Mr. Janman: Is my right hon. Friend aware of press reports which speculate that the public sector borrowing requirement for 1991-92 will be £9 billion? Does he agree that during the forthcoming 12 months it is important that the Government apply the same discipline to themselves as companies in the private sector are having to apply, and that Government spending should take into account prevailing economic conditions, not pretend that they do not exist?

The Prime Minister: We must certainly always take into account the prevailing economic conditions in terms of public expenditure control. That is certainly what we shall do.

Q4. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Prime Minister recall one of his early votes in the House of Commons on 20 December 1979, when he voted to break the link between pensions and earnings? Does he realise that as a result of that, pensioners have not enjoyed increases in their standard of living through general improvements and that they are now worse off by £22 a week for a married couple and £13 a week for a single pensioner? Does he realise that if those links had not been broken, people would have had sufficient money to pay for fuel, make sure that they had enough to eat and put on warm clothing and so combat the cold weather? Does not the Prime Minister realise that against that background, the announcement that he has made today of the extra £1 heating allowance is extremely miserly?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is being very selective in the figures that he quotes. If he cares to examine the degree of net disposable income among all sectors of the community, including the elderly, he will find that it has risen substantially throughout the past decade.

Mr. Lee: Given that our nation likes a modest flutter as much as it likes a traditional Happy Eater breakfast, does my right hon. Friend care to give some encouragement today to those of us who favour the concept of a national lottery designed to provide additional resources for sports, the arts and museums?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an intriguing question.

Community Care

Q5. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's present policy towards Sir Roy Griffiths's recommendation that local authorities should perform the lead role in the provision of community care.

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy on community care remains as set out in the White Paper "Caring For People" and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Local authorities begin implementation of those policies in April this year.

Mr. Clarke: What steps does the Prime Minister intend to take to deal with the increasing problems of many elderly people in residential care who have witnessed a growing number of closures of private and voluntary sector homes as a result of the care gap and inadequate income support? Will he absolutely insist that elderly people do not suffer, in spite of the need for social service and social work departments to reduce their expenditure in order to avoid poll tax capping, even though the real anxiety is to respond to elderly people's needs, which they recognise in their own communities?

The Prime Minister: The concerns for elderly people that the hon. Gentleman sets out and which local authorities have are well understood and appreciated. He weakens his case by his remarks about community charge capping, not least because a large number of those authorities that face capping do so because of a flagrant and wilful abuse of their expenditure in many aspects.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is considerable anxiety in local government, not least among the staff of part III residential homes and also, of course, the residents of those homes, that many local authorities feel obliged to put such homes into the private or charitable sector, thus creating considerable instability? Will my right hon. Friend take account of the anxiety, particularly among elderly people and their families, who are deeply upset by the instability that is being created?

The Prime Minister: What we are seeking to do is to ensure the maximum availability of the appropriate sort of accommodation and to ensure that it is provided in the most cost-effective manner. That accommodation may, on occasion, be in the public or the private sector, but it is the quantum of assistance with which I know my hon. Friend is most concerned.

Engagements

Q6. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fraser: Does the Prime Minister recall that shortly before he became Prime Minister he said that the subject that he cares most about is education? He repeated those sentiments at the Young Conservatives' conference at the weekend. I have in my hand the sum total of all those speeches made by the right hon. Gentleman on education since 1979—it averages one line a year. Can the Prime Minister put in the Library any other speeches on this subject, which is so close to his heart?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is being uncharacteristically fatuous

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: If colleagues insist, I shall withdraw "uncharacteristically". For the bulk of the period in the House since 1979 I have either been in the Whips' Office, and thus unable to speak, or a Minister with other departmental responsibilities. If the hon. Gentleman had had what undoubtedly would have been an education to him from listening to the speeches that I have made outside the House he would not have asked that question.

Q7. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Squire: Despite my right hon. Friend and I both having left state schols at 16 and therefore, perhaps being poor educational advertisements *[Interruption.]* I said perhaps. Would my right hon. Friend underline his determination that standards and diversity in our state schools are enhanced and improved, and above all, that the staying-on rate of students beyond 16 and 18 is increased?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to endorse my hon. Friend's point. Education is undoubtedly the key in the future to opening new paths for people, not just people with high abilities, but, of course, people with much lesser abilities as well. We want an education system that rewards dedicated teachers and provides education in the state sector of which we can be proud. That is what we shall be increasingly reaching towards throughout the Conservative Governments of the 1990s.

BILL PRESENTED

Misuse of Drugs (Anabolic Steroids)

Mr. Menzies Campbell presented a Bill to extend the coverage of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to include certain drugs which have been misused for the purpose of improving performance in sport: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 March and to be printed. [Bill 83.]

Coal Imports

3.32 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the import of coal into the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

The purpose of the Bill is to end inconsistency and to give British Coal a chance to hold its markets. We know that, when current contracts run out, the chairman of National Power, the largest coal user in the United Kingdom, is planning to import 50 per cent. of the coal needed to run its power stations.

On 14 January, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that Mr. Baker is planning to seek international tenders for all National Power's coal needs shortly after it is privatised. Another report in the *Financial Times* on 4 January suggested that National Power would be investing in three new coal import facilities on Teesside, Humberside and Milford Haven.

The special report published by the Committee considering the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill asked the Government to take whatever steps were necessary, in the overall national interest, to protect the coal industry. That has not happened, and the Government seem willing to overlook activities that are detrimental to the coal industry.

The Committee considered two private Bills—the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill. The latter was withdrawn because it was amended by the Committee. The Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), said that, in the light of advice from Speaker's Counsel,

"We unanimously decided that we wished to see further provision made to regulate any possible future sale of the proposed North Killingholme facilities, over and above the provisions of the existing general law."

He went on:

"We therefore unanimously agree that clause 26 of the Bill should be amended with wording along the lines that the installation cannot be sold for 10 years after the passing of the Bill, and thereafter only with the express consent of the Secretary of State."

The issue was not addressed during the proceedings on the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill, for two possible reasons. First, in introducing the Bill to the Committee, Sir Frank Layfield indicated that the major improvements to the port at Immingham

"were not specifically designed in any sense of the word for coal purposes. They depend specifically upon general industrial and other consumers' current needs and the need to eliminate present existing wasteful difficulties and practices."

Secondly, Sir Keith Stuart, chairman of Associated British Ports, told the Committee that Associated British Ports did not intend to go to the capital markets to raise the finance for the Immingham project. He said:

"The company's ability to generate the cash required for its investment in its ports is such that for our foreseeable needs we are expecting the business itself to generate sufficient capital for investments of this kind in terms of the initial cash input."

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it did not occur to the Committee that a company as profitable as Associated British Ports would seek finance for its proposed new Humber terminal. But that is precisely what it has done. The *Financial Times* of 15 January reported that the terminal, with a capacity of 12 million tonnes of coal, is to be financed and run as a joint venture between PowerGen and National Power, and that the generating companies plan to take a 40 per cent. stake each in the company, with ABP holding the remaining 20 per cent. The *Financial Times* report pointed out that that was at the centre of the generating companies' plans to reduce dependence on supplies from British Coal.

There could have been nothing but sharp practice by the sponsors of the Associated British Ports Bill. The House should understand that the Committee, which was dealing with two Bills at the same time, threw the Killingholme Bill out because it included an amendment giving the right to sell. The Associated British Ports Bill was allowed to proceed because there was never any suggestion in Committee of an intention to sell; indeed, the contrary was the case. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the Committee would have taken the same decision on it had it included such an amendment. Now we find that National Power and PowerGen are to own 80 per cent. of the company.

Following that, there is an announcement from Mr. Baker, chairman of National Power, that he intends to import 50 per cent. of his coal from abroad after the end of the 1993 contracts. What the company did in deceiving the Committee and, in effect, the House, was tantamount to sharp practice. Without that sharp practice, I am sure that it would not have received permission from the House to go ahead with the development.

My Bill would give the Secretary of State power, through the House, to control imports of coal. The Secretary of State would be required to base his or her judgment on the national interest and not on short-term commercial interest. The Secretary of State would control people in powerful positions, elected by no one, and prevent them from taking decisions which could destroy the country's reserves of coal for short-term benefit, resulting in the United Kingdom being at the mercy of foreign competitors in meeting the national demands over the medium and longer term.

No one outside the democratic forum of the House should be allowed to take major decisions to destroy a great industry that supplies the main source of our energy when, in years to come, we shall need that energy; otherwise, we shall be in the hands of foreign competitors. Therefore, I ask the House to support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse, Mr. Kevin Barron, Mr. Allen McKay, Mr. George J. Buckley, Mr. William O'Brien, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Peter Hardy, Mr. Alexander Eadie, Mr. Eric Illsley, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Don Dixon and Mr. Joe Benton.

Coal Imports

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse accordingly presented a Bill to prohibit the import of coal into the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 84.]

British Technology Group Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.42 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill paves the way for the privatisation of the British Technology Group. BTG combined the National Research Development Corporation and the National Enterprise Board. Except for one remaining semi-dormant subsidiary, all the investments in the NEB portfolio have been sold, put into receivership or liquidated. Therefore, BTG's operations are now those of the NRDC, focusing on technology transfer.

BTG has 188 employees and a turnover of £30 million. It obtains new ideas and inventions from universities, Government research establishments, private companies and individuals. It funds their development to a stage where they can be globally patented. It licenses the resulting intellectual property rights to industry worldwide, gaining an income in the process. Its United Kingdom turnover is only £10 million, which puts its size into perspective in an economy of about £600,000 million. Its investments have included such international successes as cephalosporin antibiotics, pyrethrin insecticides and magnetic resonance imaging technology, used in hospital scanners.

Until 1985, BTG had the right of first refusal to exploit research in the public sector. Since 1985, universities and other public sector organisations have been able to exploit their own scientific advances, often through industrial companies. Despite that, the flow of inventions from universities to BTG has increased since 1985. Today, it is involved with 1,600 inventions, 8,500 patents and nearly 500 licences.

BTG's profits tend to depend on a few projects, making BTG's resulting profit trend uneven. But during the past five years, BTG's operating profits have averaged more than £4 million per year, rising to £6·8 million in 1989-90. BTG has been self-financing for almost 20 years. It has paid dividends to the Exchequer—a total of more than £18 million in the past six years. Transferring BTG to the private sector would rid it of restrictions on borrowing powers, obligations to submit investments for approval by the Department of Trade and Industry and remove the requirement that the salaries of its chairman and chief executive should be agreed with my Department and the Treasury.

BTG wants to develop its activities as an international organisation. It already derives 70 per cent. of its licensed income from outside the United Kingdom. Preliminary steps have been taken to expand overseas, with investments and agreements in the United States, India and several European universities. The original NRDC duties appear increasingly inappropriate for such international developments, and their removal would facilitate BTG's expansion.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): The Minister of State mentioned that BTG supports the privatisation. Is he aware that the company has spent £75,000 on commissioning a public relations campaign to persuade Members of Parliament? Is he aware that page 4 of the document that I have been given, "Communication Programme for British Technology Group" states:

"BTG has the opportunity to have a parliamentary friend on the Standing Committee of the Bill."

Will the Minister tell the House whether his Department has authorised the expenditure of £75,000 of our money to lobby Members of Parliament? Has any Minister, or anyone representing a Minister, informed BTG that it has

"an opportunity to have a parliamentary friend"

on the Committee discussing the Bill?

Mr. Redwood: BTG has many parliamentary friends, and I am sure that its case will be put strongly by those who support it and who think that the management's wish for privatisation is a good idea. I do not know whether any money has been spent in the way that the hon. Gentleman described. I shall look into that, and see whether it is true. I do not know where he has obtained that information.

Mr. Brown: Is the Minister telling the House that BTG has or has not been authorised to spend £75,000 to promote its activities in pursuit of privatisation among Members of Parliament? Does he deny that the Department of Trade and Industry or anyone representing it have given an assurance that BTG will have

"an opportunity to have a parliamentary friend on the . . . Committee"?

We need direct answers to those direct questions.

Mr. Redwood: I have already said that I will let the hon. Gentleman know when I have researched the matter. There is no point in me giving him a categorical denial before I am sure. That is not a question that I have asked. I shall ask it for him and let him know. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs will give him the answer at the end of the debate, when we have had a chance to go into the matter.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Having been a parliamentary candidate for Peckham in his earlier political existence, the Minister will know that BTG is based in Southwark. When he addresses the issue, will he recognise that there is no overwhelming view in favour of the privatisation of BTG, the majority of the staff are against it, its track record is good and, as far as I am aware, there has been no criticism of its activities in the past? Does he accept that it is perceived that the Government are adopting the view put forward by the management, which is a minority view in BTG, and that that is a dogmatic, not a sensible or rational, way forward for BTG? Has the Minister a closed mind, or does he still have an open mind for the best way forward for this well respected and reputable group?

Mr. Redwood: We have an open mind on the exact style and form of privatisation, and I and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State wish to hear the views of the House on the subject. But we are strongly advised by the senior management of BTG that they believe that it would be in the best interests of the group to pass into the private sector, for the reasons that I have already set out. They are good reasons, which will be welcomed strongly by Conservative Members. The management of BTG are running a commercial enterprise. There are certain restrictions on the group's conduct by virtue of its public sector status which the management would rather be rid

[Mr. Redwood]

of, because they believe that that would add to their success. I am happy to back that judgment. The Government back the BTG board's view.

Mr. Brown: Will the Minister confirm that 75 per cent. of the staff have expressed opposition to the proposal to privatise the group, and that severe doubts have been expressed by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, which says it has not even been consulted about the proposal? Will he publish the Coopers and Lybrand study commissioned by his Department some time ago, which he has never brought to the House or put into the Library but which I understand says that the difficulties of privatising the organisation are far greater than anticipated, and recommends that privatisation should not be proceeded with?

Mr. Redwood: I do not intend to reveal that study, because it has much interesting information that could only help those who might wish to negotiate the purchase of the group. It contains a lot of sensitive information about prospective values, which could only help those who would wish to get a finer deal as a result. But it is not right for the hon. Gentleman to assume something about the thrust of a report that he has not read. He expresses an extraordinary clairvoyance which is unwarranted in the light of the intricate details in the report. One thing that the report does draw attention to is the fact that it could damage top management morale if its clearly expressed view in favour of privatisation were ignored. The hon. Gentleman might like to think about that.

We have consulted the universities widely, and it is interesting to note that only 12 per cent. of those that have responded wish to keep BTG as it is. All the others think that there is a strong case for change. Some believe that a more commercial approach in the private sector would be exactly right for BTG.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that he is interested in the views of employees; that is something which I am sure will emerge from the debate and will be carefully read by my right hon. Friend and by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): My question relates to the point raised by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) about the universities. Because the vice-chancellors feel that they were not consulted in the early stages of this process, they are in some doubt about existing arrangements, and I hope that my hon. Friend can now reassure them. BTG holds a large number of university patents, so may we have an assurance that those are not at risk and that the privatised company will offer the same opportunities for technology transfer and the use of university research?

Mr. Redwood: This is one of the important points that we wish to draw out from the debate. It is one of the important details surrounding the sale that have not yet been determined. That is why the Government have come to the House with an enabling Bill, and why we wish to sound out the opinion of the House.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): So that we can understand the intellectual basis on which the Government are proceeding with privatisation, will the Minister answer this question? Did the Coopers and Lybrand study come to the conclusion that it was advisable that this proposed privatisation should not be proceeded with? Will the Minister answer that question with yes or no?

Mr. Redwood: I have already made my comments on this complex study, which provided a lot of background information on the sale. There is no way that I shall be drawn further when there is a lot of price-sensitive information in that report, which could only help those who wish to buy the group more cheaply than they should.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Is it not a fact that one constituent part of the BTG, the National Research Development Corporation, has to get ministerial approval to borrow more than £250,000, which is peanuts in developing a business? Such restrictions stop BTG moving forward. It is a successful group, making good profits, and it could expand much more. I am sure that, if it were explained to the staff—perhaps better than it has been in the past—that when these embargos have been removed, the group can raise all the money it needs, provided that it has viable projects, and that its future will be much better in the private sector, they would be more enthusiastic.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. There is an investment limit above which it needs to refer to the Government. It would expedite matters if the group did not have that limit. The Opposition say that we should change all these rules, but this is a public sector body. It has to be accountable through the normal public sector devices all the time that it remains in the public sector. One cannot make one rule for the BTG and other rules for other bodies.

The House would rightly say that every penny of money going through BTG is a matter for public accountability, and there have to be rules. We say that there should be only commercial rules, because BTG is trying to be a commercial operation and therefore fit better in the private sector, in the way that BTG's senior management are suggesting.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Minister referred to the support of top management for this scheme. I have a question about integrity, independence and impartiality. I am informed that, two years ago, the council of BTG declared itself in favour of privatisation, subject to those three Is being guaranteed. Are they guaranteed?

Mr. Redwood: This is another matter that will be reviewed under the enabling powers in the Bill. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making those points. We wish to go away and to draw up, with our advisers, the detailed proposals for sale documentation, for whatever form of sale may be appropriate.

That is exactly the kind of issue, along with that raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), that we shall have to work through, and the debate will be useful. The Opposition now say that they want a blueprint for every issue, but if we had that, there would be no point in the House debating the matter. We are bringing it to the House at an early stage so that we can take enabling powers to privatise BTG. There is an overwhelming case for privatising the enterprise, and we need to discuss the best way forward.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: I must make progress. The hon. Gentleman has already asked many questions.

Clause 1 vests all the property, rights and liabilities of the corporation and the board in a newly created company. Clause 2 extinguishes the corporation's capital reserve and the board's public dividend capital, as these will be replaced by the Government's shareholding. Clause 3 provides for the creation of the initial Government shareholding in the successor company. Clause 4 enables the Government to acquire additional shares or securities in the successor company. This, for example, would enable the Government to maintain the proportionate level of their shareholding, if they retain one, in the event of new issues and rights issues.

Clause 6 limits the Government's shareholding as a proportion of ordinary voting rights to the level at which it stands after privatisation. Clause 7 provides for the creation of a statutory reserve and for continuity in the accounts. Clause 8 provides that the Government may make loans to the successor company after vesting has taken place, but before privatisation. That would allow money to be lent if privatisation were delayed for any reason.

Clause 9 provides that any power entitling the Government to restrict the borrowing of the successor company shall be exercisable in the national interest. Clause 10 provides for the continuation of the corporation and the board after the establishment of the successor company to assist with completion of the transfer of assets. Clause 11 deals with the tax liability of the successor company, and clauses 12 to 17 contain various supplementary provisions.

Schedule 1 provides for the corporation and the board to do everything necessary to facilitate the vesting of their property in the successor company. Schedule 2 provides for the repeal of legislation which currently regulates or refers to the corporation and to the board. That is important, because it includes repeal of parts of the Development of Inventions Act 1967 and of part I and schedules 1 and 2 of the Industry Act 1975.

My Department has appointed Price Waterhouse to advise on the options for sale. The choice of option will be influenced by the interest shown by prospective purchasers during the coming months. The Government have made no decision yet about the method of sale and will listen carefully to the views expressed within the House by management, employees and other interested parties before deciding on the final option. I hope that Opposition Members will participate constructively in this debate, rather than giving endless press conferences attacking the whole idea.

The British Technology Group is making money. It has backed some good projects and it now needs the self-reliance of the private sector to go about its business. The Bill abolishes the National Enterprise Board and removes from the statute book the power for more such Government meddling in business.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) will doubtless launch a tirade against these changes, as he did earlier this morning in a press conference. He will stand and fall as an advocate of "back to the 1960s and 1970s" failure. He may have cast off his 1960s drainpipe trousers and cut his 1960s student hair, but his ideas are still fixed in 1960s mode. He will conjure up images of the great days of the National Enterprise Board, to be transformed by 1990s high tech and training. We will hear the usual cascade of invective. He will say it, he will say it again and then he will bellow it. He will say it with repetition, with deviation—although not usually with hesitation.

I hear that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East once wrote an original speech. Unfortunately, we have had to listen to dozens of versions of the same thing ever since.

I have three questions for the hon. Members opposite. Labour say that the Government need to intervene to increase investment in Britain. My first question to them is, how much taxpayers' money would they want to spend on such an enterprise? I shall happily give way to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East if he wishes to give the House some real information for a change. But no—he does not seem to want to.

Are the Opposition aware that total investment in the United Kingdom now runs at £100,000 million each year, and that the BTG, by the way, invests just £11 million? Do they have a sense of the significance of those figures? To have any decent impact on the national total of investment, Labour must be planning for Government to spend at least an extra £10 billion, which the market does not provide—and that would still be less than 2 per cent. of GDP, although it is around 1,000 times the figure that the British Technology Group currently spends.

Will the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East confirm BTG would need at least as much as that in his scheme of things according to his analysis of the situation? Is he aware that many of his hon. Friends—I wish more of them were here today—believe that the last two Labour Governments' investment plans were ruined by a shortage of cash?

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Is this relevant?

Mr. Redwood: This is the key to the argument. The Bill will remove the damaging powers from the statute book which Labour used in the past and says that it would want to use again. The hon. Friends of the Member for Dunfermline, East feel that, if the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation and the NEB had had more money and made more investments, they would have done better. How does he answer them? Or is the shadow Treasury going to act as the bad nanny, by taking the Socialist toys away again?

My second question is this: why should we believe that the Opposition, with all the talents that are arrayed before us, will be able to spot investments that the private sector has missed? The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is indeed a talented man—a temporary lecturer at Edinburgh university, a lecturer in politics at a college of technology and a journalist with Scottish Television—but he has never run a factory or made anything to sell in his entire life. And this is the hon. Gentleman who thinks that he could spot all the winners.

The hon. Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) was a trade union official; the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) has lectured in French at two universities; the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) is a medic; and the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) was an administrative officer at a college. Not one of them has ever managed a business or made a substantial investment, and none of them has had to rely on clients or customers to pay their wages. Where is the magic ingredient?

Mr. Alex Carlile: When has the Minister ever worked in a productive industry?

Mr. Redwood: For some time, I chaired an industrial company which was deeply involved in industrial life up and down the country. As a Minister behind a Government desk, I would not venture to spot winners, because I know from my business experience how difficult it is and how much it needs the commercial background of the private sector.

Mr. Carlile: Given all his experience as a banker, and his understanding of the City, can the Minister confirm that the most difficult thing for any entrepreneur or new business to obtain is free venture capital, and that the British Technology Group is one body from which it is possible to obtain such capital?

Mr. Redwood: I was trying to draw the House's attention to the sums involved. The hon. and learned Gentleman obviously was not watching last week, when the Department of Trade and Industry announced one part of a new programme of support for the type of investment that he is talking about. We shall be announcing expenditure of £30 million over three years for just such a purpose; that is more than the BTG is offering on its past annual figures. I agree that there is a need; the DTI is meeting it. Overall, the research and development allocation, and the other money available through the DTI, far exceeds what is available through the BTG.

My third question to the Opposition is this: why should the nation believe that the policies will be any different next time? It is not as though we were being offered anything new. The names may have changed, but the institutions proposed in Labour's documents look horribly familiar. Labour wants an NIB: that is one of the reasons for their opposition to the Bill. What does NIB stand for? "Normally Invested Badly"? "Nationalised Institution for Bankruptcy", perhaps? I think that those would be better characterisations than "National Investment Bank".

The National Enterprise Board, in its heyday, was a loss maker that hastened many of its investments to the liquidator. The House should remember the enthusiasm with which the NEB identified that "office of the future" market as one with boundless opportunities. It was right: many private-sector companies have done well by selling fax machines, xeroxes, electronic mail and the like. The final cost to the NEB and the taxpayer of those boundless opportunities in a high-growth, high-tech market were losses of £34 million.

The NEB also had to write off £6·8 million from its United States investment in software—a marketplace in which many others coined fortunes and supplied good products. So much for Labour's chant that next time it would be different, because it would concentrate on electronics and software. That was yesterday's story, and yesterday's disaster for the taxpayer.

Nor was the NEB much better in other sectors. Alfred Herbert, BTB (Engineering), Technalogics Computing Ltd., Microform Communications, Vicort, Mollart Engineering, Momex, QI (Europe), Gemspar, Sandiacre Electrics, Hilton Products, Preformed Road Markings, ASR Servotron and many others all went under. Holdings in Brown Boveri, Consine International, Negretti and Zambra and Energy Equipment, to name but a few, were sold at losses. The losses in tanning and clockmaking were as spectacular as they were predictable. The NIB, with branches in every major city, would be a sure-fire loser. There might be more noughts on the cheques, but they would go down the same old drain.

Labour also seeks a BTE. "Better Try Everything"? This morning, a sneak preview on the "Today" programme revealed a name change to BTC—"Britain Taking Chances", perhaps. In Labour's public bar all the investments would be on the rocks, and most of Labour's planned subsidies would be illegal under the treaty of Rome.

The British Technology Company could not do anything that the privatised British Technology Group cannot do. BTG has worked with companies pioneering new communications equipment, new farming systems, a more efficient combine harvester and a variable transmission system for cars. It is an important discipline that money should be committed only when there is a prospect of returns. That is the discipline which Labour still has not learnt or cannot accept.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is, I hear, having a few problems with his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). Naturally, they do not like him always muscling in on the economy whenever there is a chance of media attention. He really should concentrate on the job he has now.

They are understandably even more worried about the hon. Gentleman's spending habits—thankfully, only shadow ones at the moment, and for a long time to come. There is his passion for regional investment—£10 billion? —and research and development—another £5 billion to make a splash? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell the House how much money he wants to spend on regional investment and research and development. He tells us time and again in his speeches that the core of his proposals is that more money should be spent upon them, through the public sector. Why cannot he tell us how much he would spend and what he would spend it on?

Then there is training. That must be another £2 billion or £3 billion to have any impact. I hear that the shadow Treasury team has said that it would like the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East to be the Member for Duninvesting, Duntraining and Dunresearching as well, for the sums do not add up.

The British Technology Group needs a new future in the private sector. The United Kingdom taxpayer needs to be reassured that the power to back losers through the National Enterprise Board has been removed from the statute book. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.5 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I intend to deal with the substance and detail of the Bill. The Bill is ill-considered and irrelevant to the huge technology gap that Britain has to close with our competitors. It does nothing to achieve the Government's stated aims for privatisation—to increase mass shareholdings, to create greater competition and to remove Government subsidies. The implications of the Bill are potentially destructive for the British Technology Group. The Bill provides no guarantee that BTG will remain British, at the forefront of technology, or even intact as a group. With no better

explanation for it than that given today by the Minister, it is in the end, I am afraid to say, privatisation for privatisation's sake.

The first impression made on anyone listening to the debate and hearing the Minister's speech must be one of surprise—indeed, astonishment. Industry faces one of its worst recessions for years. Output has fallen faster than at any time, with the sole exception of 1980, during the past 60 years. There has been a record number of bankruptcies and closures, even of high technology companies. Nevertheless, the Department of Trade and Industry, with its wide responsibilities for both trade and industry, has introduced its second privatisation Bill in as many weeks. It has followed up its unwanted and unpopular privatisation of export credit insurance last month with this unnecessary proposal to privatise the British Technology Group.

Is it not the case that, as the public expenditure White Paper revealed on its publication only a few minutes ago, that the Government's withdrawal from the British Technology Group is the latest in a line of reductions in Government support for investment in technology? There has been a 25 per cent. underspend on regional innovation grants, a £42 million underspend on industrial research and development, a cut of 40 per cent. on research and development by 1991 and a cut of 34 per cent. on technology transfer by 1992.

Even with the addition of the SPUR scheme—support for products under research—which the Minister mentioned at the end of his speech, support for innovation will fall, in real terms, in the coming year, according to the White Paper. The total cuts in the DTI's budget over the next three years will be of the order of £370 million. I can think of no other Government in Europe who have simultaneously cut their training and industry budgets in the run-up to 1992 but have spent their time instead on privatising national assets that they can ill afford to put at risk.

Mr. Redwood: How can there have been a reduction in support for technology when the British Technology Group has been financing itself for 20 years and has paid dividends to the Government?

Mr. Brown: I am referring to the total technology budget—the budget for technology transfer and for research and development. I am also taking into account the much-publicised announcement—it has been announced five times during the last two months—of the SPUR scheme. At a time when recession faces industry, and when all our European competitors are preparing for 1992, this Government are cutting support for technology.

Let us be clear about the purpose of this Bill. Its main and most immediate effect is to wind up the National Research Development Corporation as a first step towards privatising the national technology organisation—a body that has enjoyed all-party support for four decades; was set up in 1949 to fill a gap in the market place; grew under the Conservative Government of the 1950s; expanded under the Development of Inventions Act 1967 in the 1960s and the 1970s; and developed yet again to suit the conditions of the 1980s. Now that body is to be abandoned to the vagaries of the marketplace, with—as the Minister confirmed today—not a single guarantee about who will run it or from where it will be run, or for the interests of whom and, as was confirmed in the Minister's answer earlier, not one guarantee about its integrity, about its impartiality or even about its independence.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman speaks with great passion. Obviously he is totally against the principles of this Bill. Will he confirm that a Labour Government, should there ever be one, will renationalise BTG? If he is not prepared to give that commitment, there cannot be very much sincerity in what he is saying.

Mr. Brown: I can give an assurance that we shall not spend public money renationalising the British Technology Group. I have made it clear—if the hon. Gentleman had followed events, he would know this very well—that we shall set up a British technology enterprise and shall work with the universities and other organisations, many of which are directly opposed to this measure.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman, on behalf of the Labour party, has just announced another initiative. Can he tell us exactly how much money will be invested in it, and whether this will be another priority area?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to remarks made earlier by his Minister for Corporate Affairs. The British Technology Group actually makes a profit. What is being privatised is a profitable group. I have no reason to believe that, operating in the public sector, and working with the patents of universities, our British technology enterprise will not itself make a profit. The purpose is to fill a gap in the marketplace that would not otherwise be filled and to take a long-term view that a private-sector company might not take. I have no reason to believe that the universities will not want to work with us in this enterprise.

Dr. Hampson: The hon. Gentleman has said that the universities are against privatisation. Perhaps he would care to correct that statement. The university vice-chancellors asked for the sort of reassurances that I requested of my hon. Friend the Minister earlier. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that, since this sort of group was founded, universities have been provided with many new means of expanding their opportunities in the market? They have found private sector companies, and quite often they have set up their own companies, to exploit their research. The needs that led to the setting up of this group no longer exist in the same form.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Indeed, technology transfer organisations and organisations such as BTG have been springing up in universities. However, I must refer to a statement issued by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals in connection with the Second Reading of the Bill. The vice-chancellors and individual universities complain that, contrary to what the Minister has said, they have never been properly consulted officially about the Government's plans or options for the privatisation of BTG. I should be very happy to give way if the Minister were prepared to explain why he has said that the universities have been consulted. I have reason to believe that many of the vice-chancellors are very dissatisfied with the proposal.

Dr. Hampson: They are not against it.

Mr. Brown: As I think the hon. Gentleman will agree, what they want is a series of assurances that the Minister has been singularly unprepared to give.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. I am anxious to be of assistance to the House. A full survey of the universities was carried out in December 1988. I can give the exact results. The option of a sale to a commercial financial institution was favoured by 20 per cent.; 5 per cent. favoured a sale to BTG management; 50 per cent. wanted to establish BTG as a private foundation or trust, with objectives linked to university research; just on a quarter wanted to keep BTG as it is at present or wanted something akin to what the Labour party wants to set up.

Mr. Brown: What the Minister has just presented is evidence that I have certainly not had until now: that only 5 per cent. want the option that is favoured by management—a management buy-out—and only 20 per cent. want the trade sale, which is what is being pushed upon the Government. In other words, only 25 per cent. want the two main options that the Government are putting before us, and 75 per cent. are not in favour of those options.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I shall give way if the Minister wants to contradict my figures.

Mr. Leigh: One can look at figures in any way one likes. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will confirm that only 25 per cent. of university vice-chancellors, when surveyed, want to keep BTG in its present state or in the state that the Labour party would like to see.

Mr. Brown: The Minister is misinterpreting what I have said. The survey shows that only 20 per cent. want the trade sale that the Department is looking at, only 5 per cent. want it to go to the management, which is the favoured option of many people, and another 50 per cent. want it to be a trust and not to be privatised in the way that the Minister is proposing. If I have got that wrong, perhaps the Minister will correct me.

Mr. Leigh: That is interesting. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, contrary to what he said earlier, the vice-chancellors were properly surveyed?

Mr. Brown: No. The vice-chancellors—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should take care to listen to the views of vice-chancellors in universities up and down the country. Many vice-chancellors will feel that the mocking from the Tory Benches when their case has been mentioned is unacceptable.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I do not intend to give way to the hon. Gentleman, since he is clearly not well versed in the issue.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I have already said that I shall not give way.

The vice-chancellors make it clear that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and individual universities have never been officially consulted about the Government's plans or options for privatisation of BTG. If the Minister wants to deny that, he should write immediately to every vice-chancellor in the country.

This is not an ordinary privatisation or, as the Minister tried to imply, the sale of a downstream company or the marketing of a run-of-the-mill business. It is the privatisation of 8,000 or more patents, involving 1,500 technologies. It includes patents such as those for anti-cancer and anti-depressant drugs and for inventions such as high-performance plastic fibres. Those ideas have been developed by BTG in the public sector; many of them came to BTG only because it was in the public sector, and some of them could be lost in their entirety if the company is transferred to the private sector as the Minister plans.

Our argument is clear. In Britain we need a body to facilitate and foster the development of inventions at the start of the technology chain. We need a body that is guaranteed its existence, which it could not be if it were a mere private sector company. We need a body with the flexibility to take a broader and more long-term view than the merely short-term interests of shareholders might allow. That requires a body run with the requirement to operate in the public interest. Our contention is that, far from public ownership being a hindrance to inventions being developed in Britain, BTG has offered the extra flexibility and scope without which long-term investments may not be given the consideration that they deserve.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): The Labour party is on record as saying that winners will be decided on commercial terms and that it will not just pick winners on the whim of somebody else's say-so. If that is so, why cannot it be done in a commercial way—or is it the Labour party's intention to go on stuffing dead ducks as it used to in the 1960s?

Mr. Brown: Is there any better example of a company that has operated commercially and successfully in the public sector than the British Technology Group? Because of its success and because it is next in line for privatisation, the Minister has brought forward today proposals to privatise it.

Let us look not at what Conservative Members say but at what has been said by some of the inventors who have benefited from BTG and believe that it benefits Britain. Magnetic resonance imaging is one of the major breakthroughs in medical diagnosis this century. The BTG said that it is comparable to the discovery of X-rays and is used routinely to generate detailed images of the tissue structure deep in the human body. In May 1990, the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said that BTG had enjoyed outstanding success in managing the patent portfolio. She said:

"This invention will do much to generate further major British innovation and keep Britain at the forefront of rapidly advancing technology."

She went on:

"This would not have been possible without the pioneering work of Professor Mansfield of Nottingham University".

What does Professor Mansfield say in a letter that he sent to me in the past few days? He says:

"I am very much concerned about the proposed privatisation . . . I fear very much that were such a proposal to go forward the interests of research, research institutions in Britain and indeed, inventors would not be best served . . . BTG has in its present form served the scientific community very well over the years . . . had they been privatised I doubt

very much whether the magnetic resonance imaging portfolio that they currently exploit would have earned very much at all".

What is his recommendation? He says:

"I feel that the patents on which my name appear cannot and should not be part of any privatisation deal since they were offered to BTG originally on the understanding that BTG was a government department, and on this basis I do not feel that they are free to dispose of them in any way whatsoever without prior consultation with me".

Here is a British inventor of international standing who is prepared to entrust his intellectual property to a body in the public domain and who states clearly that his invention would not have succeeded as well as it did without the activities of the public sector. He believes that the essential development of such inventions can and should be done in the public sector, and he feels so strongly about it that if the body ceases to exist in the public sector, he wants to have no dealings with it in the private sector.

It is no wonder that the *Financial Times*, one of many newspapers that have expressed doubts about the proposal since it was first mooted, said:

"instead of thinking about privatising the BTG the Department of Trade should be thinking how to improve it".

Pyrethrine is the technology applied to some of the world's most widely used insecticides. Did the Government consult the inventor who had entrusted his patent to BTG before they decided on the privatisation measure? The answer is no. Under privatisation, the patent is to be moved from the public to the private sector. The inventor himself, Mr. Michael Elliot, wrote to me saying:

"finance from NRDC allowed research to be developed and applied that the private sector had judged to be too speculative or long term."

Support such as this in the public sector can arise only if BTG is allowed to operate with its own structure and integrity. It is wrong to privatise BTG now without adequate guarantees to protect its role in supporting research in Britain.

Yet another scientist of international standing is opposed to the ill-considered privatisation proposal. Brian Oakley of Logica says:

"I can see no point in privatising it."

A former director of BTG who has written to me privately says:

"I believe it would be a disaster if BTG is sold off to private interests."

The vast majority of staff—three quarters of them—have come out today against the proposal. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals says, as I have reported, that it has not been properly consulted. The Coopers and Lybrand report, of which the Minister has refused to give details, expressed if not opposition, reservations about the proposals.

Who now supports the Bill? The only supporters of the Department of Trade and Industry are the Government's business machine and the senior management of the British Technology Group. However, I must tell the Minister that the document that I mentioned earlier reveals that he has problems with both those groups as well.

I have here the document that was commissioned by the British Technology Group at a cost of £75,000 for the media campaign and which was prepared by The Communication Group plc. It is now the subject of a communications campaign targeted on ourselves as the Bill goes through the House. A total of £75,000 of our money is to be used to persuade us to agree to the privatisation of BTG. Some £5,000 is to be used to cover press materials and the entertainment of journalists. Some £2,500 is to be used for a half-day session for the media training of Mr. Ian Hardy and two other senior executives to

"explore and develop the privatisation arguments".

There is money to deal with "potentially hostile awkward questions".

What else is in the document for the £75,000? It proposes the "privatisation commemorative gift". The document recommends:

"Looking further ahead, some thought should be given to a commemorative gift for the principal commercial partners to mark the occasion."

The gift in this privatisation is the 8,000 patents developed in the public sector which are now to be handed over to the private sector on a plate, commemorative or other.

Who supports the Bill? The document makes it absolutely clear that the Bill has engendered the hostility of the Government's business managers. It states clearly that the Bill

"is proceeding against the natural inclination of the party managers"

The document continues:

"Against this background, trenchant criticism"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] I am quoting from a document commissioned by the British Technology Group, which says:

"Against this background, trenchant criticism may weaken the business managers' resolve to press ahead with any great speed . . . the business managers' priorities in all this are a quiet time with no banana skins and a light programme to allow Tory MPs plenty of time in their constituencies."

[Laughter.] Conservative Members have confirmed the problem that I have just identified. According to BTG's own document, there is no support for the measure from the Government's business managers.

What does the company itself want? Does it wholly support the Bill? The Minister said that it had given its assiduous—indeed, enthusiastic—support, although he had to recognise that three quarters of the staff were opposed to the Bill. The document says that BTG wants to make some major amendments to the Bill in Committee. The group will be seeking "firm commitments", which it wants to be "mostly extracted" during the Committee stage and possibly on Report. The document says:

"MPs may well be able to extract more from Ministers than the DTI would otherwise like to give."

What is the attitude of the Bill's principal supporters? The Government Whips and business managers say that their natural instinct is against the Bill, and BTG—cited by the Minister as the main supporter of the Bill—proposes to seek to make major changes to it.

The BTG document is worrying in another respect. It suggests that the Government have given the group the opportunity

"to have a parliamentary friend on the Committee."

The document continues:

"Much careful and extremely sensitive work must be done behind the scenes in the next few days."

If that is what is happening, it is a misuse of parliamentary procedure and it should stop now.

Who is left supporting the Bill? It is none other than the Secretary of State himself. Two days ago there appeared in *The Observer* an article entitled:

"Why I am privatising British technology".

Yet the Secretary of State cannot appear in the House to defend his own Bill. Perhaps he should have added to the title of his article, "Why I am insisting on the Bill being

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debated in the Commons when I cannot appear to defend the proposals." He is not so much a no-turning-back Minister as a no-turning-up Minister.

Mr. Redwood: That was most uncalled for. My right hon. Friend has been in India, working hard for Britain. He is travelling back today, as I think the hon. Gentleman knows. The Secretary of State is fully behind the Bill. He is allowing his fellow Ministers to see it through on this occasion because he is busy elsewhere. The hon. Gentleman should withdraw his slur.

Mr. Brown: As the Minister knows, we offered the Secretary of State plenty of opportunities to be here when we debated the Bill. We offered to change the Second Reading date so that he could be here to introduce it. We made the offer to the Department of Trade and Industry.

In the article in *The Observer*, the Secretary of State explained that he proposed to privatise BTG, first, because it was held back in many respects by its status as a public sector organisation; secondly, because bureaucratic restraints inevitably imposed themselves on statutory bodies; and, thirdly, because BTG will be able in the private sector to take up more opportunities and provide a comprehensive service.

Who is holding BTG back in the public sector? Who is imposing the bureaucratic constraints? Who is denying BTG the opportunity to provide a comprehensive service in the public sector? Who is to blame if BTG is suffering in those respects? If anyone is to blame, it is the Government, who have presided over BTG for the past 12 years. If anyone is holding BTG back it is the Secretary of State, and it is the right hon. Gentleman who imposes constraints. If there are problems—I do not believe that the problems are in any way serious—the Minister should set about solving them. Indeed, he should have solved them years ago. To let the problems persist and then to use them as a pretext for the simplistic measure that we have before us is doubly irresponsible.

The Minister was on the radio this morning and said of BTG's management that they did not think that the Department's involvement helped. I suppose that, if I were in BTG, I should be worried about the Ministers who came to see me.

Is the Minister really telling us that France, Germany and Japan, which have technology transfer organisations similar to BTG, can solve their problems within the public sector but that in Britain it is somehow beyond the imagination of the Department of Trade and Industry to do so? Let us consider what the Secretary of State had to admit in that article. He said:

> We must ensure that a framework exists for the dissemination of new technology . . .
> The benefit of the fine work that has been carried out in Britain and overseas research organisations will never be seen unless an effective network of technology transfer is in place."

Is not that the argument for BTG to remain in the public sector?

What guarantee is contained in the Bill that the technology transfer network will continue to exist in the private sector? As BTG has said of itself:

> "involvement in technology is a natural continuation of, and not a substitute for, research which may have been funded by research councils or other organisations."

In Britain we need a body that bridges the gap between ideas and concepts and develops them to the point of commercial exploitation. The existence of such a body cannot be left to the vagaries of the marketplace, as the Bill seeks to do. Such a body must be sufficiently flexible and have enough scope to invest for the long term.

Mr. Redwood: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the amount of research and development finaced by BTG is about 0·1 per cent. of total R and D? Does that mean that all the other R and D does not work or does not count because it is in the private sector? The hon. Gentleman has never answered that point.

Mr. Brown: The Minister has not answered the straight point that I put to him. BTG does a good job in the public sector. If it is thrown into the marketplace there will be no guarantee that it will continue to exist. It may not have the capacity or ability to take the long-term view that is necessary when supporting inventions. The weight of evidence is growing that other countries, such as France, which has ANVAR, Japan, which has its own research and development corporation, and Germany, where corporations and organisations work through the Länder, recognise the need for such a body. So why does the Minister persist in pursuing privatisation in Britain?

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): The hon. Gentleman referred to Japan as a country which has a state-run R and D body. Is he aware that the Japanese percentage of state support for civil R and D is one of the lowest in all the developed countries and has been consistently so for the past 20 or 30 years? Bearing in mind that Japan is indisputably the most successful economy in the world, does not that fact lead the hon. Gentleman to question some of the fundamental suggestions that underlie his beliefs?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the position. The issue is how the public and private sectors can work together to increase the amount of research and development and new technology that is stimulated in the economy. The hon. Gentleman would do better to consider some of the problems that have arisen in the British economy because of the lack of investment in technology, and to compare us with Japan, which has done far better. He might be more worried about the rise in unemployment in his constituency as a result of the Government's failures.

Why is the privatisation being imposed on us now? None of the traditional arguments for privatisation hold. The 1987 Conservative manifesto said that privatisation was about insisting that small investors and the employees of privatised companies should have a fair chance of buying shares. Yet the Bill contains no guarantee that any new shareholders will be individuals or employees. As the chairman of the company graphically put it:

> "This will be no widows' and orphans' sale."

The Minister cannot claim that the sale will inevitably be an extension of popular capitalism. Nor will it inevitably increase competition because the Bill opens the way to BTG being taken over and perhaps asset-stripped by a competitor. There may even be less competition as a result of the measure.

Nor will privatisation of BTG reduce the burden on the state—the other argument for privatisation. The 1983 Tory manifesto said:

> "The burden of financing the state's industries has kept taxes and Government borrowing higher than they need be."

But, of course, BTG gives money to the Government. The Government do not give money to it. There is no argument for privatising it if the argument for privatisation is a desire to reduce state subsidy. Nor will the Government obtain proper value for money if BTG is sold to the private sector.

Does the Minister agree that BTG has £20 million or more in liquid assets, as stated in its accounts, that it has offices worth more than £10 million, investments that are worth nearly £30 million and other assets that could be liquidated for more than £50 million? The price of the sale, however, which has been quoted in the newspapers at the moment is little more than £35 million. When the Under-Secretary replies perhaps he will tell us what is being paid out to sell the company. What is the cost of the Coopers and Lybrand report? What is the cost of the Lazard's report? What is the cost of the Price Waterhouse appointment? What will be the cost of the time taken to change the patents? I understand that just to change the name on patents abroad will cost in excess of £1 million of taxpayers' money.

Far from costing the country money in the public sector, where it is required to break even, the company has made profits in successive years of £13 million, £11 million, £8 million, £10 million, £2 million, £5 million, £7 million, £7 million, £3 million, £6 million, £7 million and £9·5 million. In each year, that company has made profits for this country and paid dividends to the Government, and sometimes it has been required to give extra cash to the Government.

The taxpayer would be far better off with BTG making money for the country in the public sector than gaining limited proceeds from selling it at an undervalued price to the private sector.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): We now come to the nub of the hon. Gentleman's argument; it is his view that BTG would be better off in the public sector. Can we take it from that that a Labour Government would, as a priority, renationalise the BTG?

Mr. Brown: I sometimes wonder why I should give way to Conservative Members, because the hon. Gentleman was clearly not in the Chamber when I answered that very same question from one of his hon. Friends. No doubt the hon. Gentleman has had circulated to him a list of questions that he should put to me during the debate. I repeat that we have made it clear that we shall set up a new organisation, British Technology Enterprise, and we hope to be able to work with the universities to develop—

Mr. Paice *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way again. We shall work with the universities to develop a technology transfer organisation for Britain.

Mr. Paice *rose*——

Mr. Brown: It would be an abuse of the House's time were I to give way to the hon. Gentleman again.

Once one strips away the old arguments for privatisation, which have no relevance to the sale, and realises that this could be a trade sale—not so much a case of tell Sid, as tell Lord Hanson and ICI—it is clear that this is privatisation for privatisation's sake. I have come to the conclusion that the only reason for privatising this company now is that it has not been privatised already.

The company is not going because it is losing money, is a drain on public finances, is a big sale that could change the face of public finance, is a sprawling bureaucracy that needs private sector efficiency, or is a sale that will create millions of shareholders—it will not. It is simply going because it is next on the list of private sector enterprises that the Government feel, as a matter of ideology, that they must sell.

Worse than that, however, the same organisation will not just be denied a place in the public sector, but will be transferred to the private sector with no guarantee that it will ever again work in the public interest. The Bill makes that clear. Let us consider the public interest considerations that were part of the Development of Inventions Act 1967 and which will be waived aside as a result of the Bill. Under the 1967 Act, the NRDC had the job of

"acquiring, holding, disposing of and granting rights . . . where the public interests so requires".

In each section of the Act the public interest was mentioned as a reason why the company had to act. Now the Government are telling us that BTG should act purely as a commercial organisation. Viscount Ullswater, speaking for the Government, said that the Government considered that its activities were now of a commercial and training—I think that he meant trading—nature and that was not appropriate for the public sector.

To relegate BTG to the status of just another company surely mistakes its role. Do the Government agree that BTG fills a role that, if it did not exist in its present form, would be unfulfilled in the marketplace? Do the Government accept that, while the company is commercial, and should be as far as it can be, its purpose is not wholly commercial? Does the Minister accept that the public interest demands that an organisation exists for developing inventions and that it should work to a remit broader than merely the interests of shareholders? The public interest is served by having guaranteed the means of facilitating the progression from invention to production in circumstances where, because of the nature of investment, there is a danger that that might not happen.

The Secretary of State has not made up his mind whether any guarantees or other conditions should be written into the Bill. He should not be bringing forward a measure that he has not yet thought through. He is in the absurd position of having made up his mind to privatise even before he has considered the practical implications. The Bill is here because, regardless of other considerations, the Minister believes in privatisation at all costs.

What guarantee should have been written into the Bill? There should be a guarantee that the company will not be asset-stripped and split up. There is no guarantee that it will remain in British hands—not one guarantee that it might not be owned in Tokyo, Taiwan, Korea or Brazil. In past privatisations, a golden share has been invoked, even in the privatisation of ordinary companies like Britoil. Indeed, a limit has been set on foreign shareholdings in the past, but in this case there is nothing in the proposals to suggest that the company may not fall into foreign hands.

There is no guarantee either that the company will remain independent or able to act impartially. Are not the work force right to argue that BTG should not be in hock to another firm and that it should not run the risk of its principal assets—its patents—being auctioned off, frittered away or simply handed over to competitors? Is not

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it also right to argue that it must be able to give objective opinions, to be trusted by inventors as impartial, and to be free of influence from a large conglomerate?

There should not be a conflict of interest with shareholders. For example, BTG holds the patent for the next generation of anti-depressant drugs, a patent with a development licence with one company, which might lead in theory to that company capitalised in billions buying over the smaller BTG capitalised in millions. It might lead to another drugs company trying to buy BTG to eliminate that venture. Clearly, the Government measure the risk to the independence, the impartiality and the integrity of the company. If the company becomes a vested interest of one private sector or of one or two private sector organisations, it cannot work in the public interest to secure the independence of the inventor or the best benefit for the country as a whole.

Let us remember that BTG took on the Pentagon only recently over the hovercraft design. At a cost to itself it won the action in the American courts. Does the Minister seriously believe that a private technology company would take on the Pentagon in the interests of British science and technology and would be able to do so from the same vantage point that public status gives to BTG?

When we say that the British Technology Group should be independent, we mean that it should be free from the control of any one vested interest in the private sector. When we say that it should retain its integrity, we believe that it should not be dependent on calculations made purely on behalf of shareholders and purely about profits and dividends, but that the public interest should allow a wider set of considerations to be introduced. That requires a balance to be struck between the need to invest long term in further scientific advance and the need to weigh the commercial cost of doing so.

Mr. Leigh: I thought that the hon. Gentleman might be coming to the end of his speech. I hope that he will tell the House his attitude towards the abolition of the National Enterprise Board.

Mr. Brown: I have made it clear from the beginning that we oppose the Bill. We will oppose it root and branch in Committee, as has been made clear from the beginning of the debate. We have argued that the Bill is doctrinaire and likely to be self-defeating in its ultimate effects on British science, technology and industry.

The Bill has been pursued not because the Government believe in British science, technology or industry but because they believe in privatisation. It is the ultimate in short-term measures from a Government dominated by a short-term approach. To privatise the one Government agency with a key role in the early development of technology, and to abandon it to the short-term pursuits of the marketplace with no guarantee that it will work for the long-term, is short-termism in its worst aspect. When faced with a simple opportunity to show that they are more interested in the long term than the short term, the Government have decided to choose the short term.

BTG is a unique and special company with a distinct purpose. For 40 years, under successive Governments, it has worked to ensure that British ideas benefit British industry in Britain. The company has worked in the public interest for the long term. Now the Government have decided that it will work in the private interest, probably for the short term. They are not privatising it to create a market discipline, because there is a competitive environment already. They are not privatising it to issue shares, because it is doubtful whether many people will get shares as a result of the privatisation. They are not privatising it principally to raise more money, because they would be better off keeping it in the public sector, with the dividends that come from its work.

The main argument is that none of the arguments about privatisation applies. The privatisation is based on dogma and on nothing else. If anything, it indicates that, despite a change of leadership, the Government have not changed in fundamentals. They are exercising a dogmatic insistence on privatising a successful public enterprise, which is working successfully in the long-term interests of British industry. They would appease the vested interests of their friends in the private sector before advancing the public interest which it is their duty to uphold. Our argument is that we need in Britain a body to facilitate the development of inventions. We will ensure that the public interest is upheld.

4.45 pm

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): The synthetic nonsense and selective quotations from internal documents from the British Technology Group which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) produced are a smokescreen to cover the real thing that worries the Labour party about the Bill. The Labour party is not worried about the merits of what goes on in the British Technology Group; its only worry is that its chief toy is being taken away from it. The Labour party invented the toy in the 1970s; that was before the hon. Gentleman was here, but I am sure that he will have read about the disasters of the National Enterprise Board in the 1970s. That toy is being taken away from the Labour party in the Bill and will not be available to an incoming Labour Government, however unlikely that event may be; I think most people would consider it most unlikely. The hon. Gentleman is angry because the Labour party has lost that toy. That is why he quoted tittle-tattle from alleged statements by people within the BTG.

It is probably extremely boring to quote what happened many years ago, but there are still hon. Members here who can remember what went on when the National Enterprise Board was in being, and how it went round punting with taxpayers' money, trying to pick winners. My hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs made a good point about the doubt that most people would have as to whether the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has the necessary experience in industry to ensure success in picking winners, whether it is done by himself or by civil servants.

Civil servants have an important role, but it is not to choose where investment should go. If the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East thinks that that is a doctrinaire statement, the fact is that we do not need to guess what might happen in the future because we can look back to what happened in the past. My hon. Friend the Minister quoted company after company that went bust under the auspices of the National Enterprise Board because it picked companies and put money into them for all the wrong reasons. Most of the companies ended in disaster.

I have told the House why the Labour party is wound up about the Bill. It is not concerned about the merits of the British Technology Group, because, as both sides of the House agree, BTG is trading profitably and is a successful business. Actually, it is a small business. This is the first case that I can remember of a small business being privatised, but I welcome all forms of privatisation. Before the hon. Gentleman tells me that that is doctrinaire, let me explain why I welcome privatisation. Again, we do not need to look into a crystal ball because we can read the book.

I do not know whether I can get the hon. Gentleman to agree with me, but I am about to make a non-partisan point; Governments of all complexions have been bad owners of businesses, because they have a different perspective from business men. Business men make judgments on the return from investment. Politicians—the hon. Gentleman and myself—are different animals. We are looking for votes. When elections come, we have to collect votes; the hon. Gentleman has to do that and so do we. Therefore, what happens? When the Treasury has to decide between one investment and another, does it decide to put money into Amersham International—when that company was nationalised it was relatively unknown—or the British Technology Group? Naturally it does not, but it puts money into schools and hospitals, about which people feel passionately, and, collects votes at elections. It does not put money into the businesses that are worthy of investments on their own merits.

We have learnt during the 40 years since the second world war that all Governments have been bad owners and we do not want to return to that. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East should consider the amazing transformation in the fortunes and fame of such companies—*[Interruption.]* I wish that the hon. Gentleman would listen for a moment, but perhaps he thinks that he knows it all. Will he raise his head and lend me an ear? Will he try to remember the success of Cable and Wireless, which was a disastrous nationalised industry? It could not even afford to pay enough to recruit a top-class financial director because the salaries of the board were controlled by the Department of Trade and Industry. It is now free to recruit the best brains, and the result is that Cable and Wireless is one of the finest businesses and is spread throughout the world. I could list many other successful privatised companies, such as British Airways, British Telecom and Amersham International which, although relatively unknown when it was nationalised, is now a world winner.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I am trying hard to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument but am finding it a little difficult. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he is content with the amount of investment in, and commitment to, research and development in those areas where we can prosper in the manufacturing industry? Does he believe that we need no commitment from central Government to ensure that it is improved?

Mr. Grylls: The worst possibility would be if politicians were to try to judge the gross amount of investment that there should be in industry. That is a matter for businesses to decide.

Ms. Armstrong: Is the hon. Gentleman content with that?

Mr. Grylls: The hon. Lady asked a question and I shall do my best to answer it, unlike some Opposition Members. She may not like my answer, but I shall at least try to answer it. It is not good for politicians to make such a judgment. We are not very good at it and we embrace all people in the political process, in Whitehall and in Westminster. Our experience shows that such decisions are best left to the people who run the businesses, understand the ins and outs of business, and decide how much to allocate to research and development. It would be wrong for us to intervene. The hon. Lady and I must part company, because we do not agree.

The British Technology Group will have great opportunities in the future. Once it is out of the nest of state control and away from the heavy hand of state interference, it can spread around the world. It is already an international business so, once privatised, it can spread its wings and build its confidence in the knowledge that, if it has a good project, it will be able to raise money automatically through the City or in foreign financial markets. It does not matter where it raises the money. But, left in the public sector, it will be for ever constrained because it will always have to request Ministers' approval before making an investment. Even the salaries of its directors are controlled by Ministers because that is the way in which nationalised industries work. One reason why they have been such a disaster is that they have been unable to recruit the highest level of management.

Dr. Hampson: I agree with all of my hon. Friend's powerful arguments. Another aspect that needs further consideration is that, once the British Technology Group is in the private sector, there is a genuine risk that such a relatively small group could be swallowed up by a major industrial corporation. Although it could, conceivably, make a great deal of money, that could be to the detriment of the company's long-term interests and some of the projects being undertaken. For example, it could be disadvantageous if a major pharmaceutical company took it over as it is involved in so many aspects of the pharmaceutical world. Will my hon. Friend consider that argument and contemplate a golden share being held by the Government to prevent that from happening, at least in the short term?

Mr. Grylls: I do not agree totally with my hon. Friend. If we are to privatise a company, we should let it be free and keep a minimum of ties with it. Whether the Government should hold a golden share is for the Committee to decide. I am sure that those hon. Members fortunate enough to be on the Committee will enjoy doing that work. I hope that I shall not be one of them. It would not be my first contribution to the National Enterprise Board, but it would be my last, to the great relief of the House.

The House should welcome this privatisation, which follows a long path of successful privatisations. The Opposition have produced no arguments today to cause anyone, either inside or outside the House, to be concerned that we are not doing the right thing in freeing the British Technology Group from the dead hand of state interference, control and restrictions. I shall watch, with the greatest of interest, to see what happens to the British Technology Group. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) said, the group may

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change and some parts of it may be put into different hands, but they will not disappear. I wish the group well and support the Bill with great enthusiasm.

4.55 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): There can be two reasons for privatising a company—on its merits, or on account of prejudice. The hon. Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) said, frankly, that he favours all privatisations, which is a straightforward way of expressing a prejudice—I use the word in a literal and not a pejorative sense—in favour of privatisation. The Government have had the opportunity to consider the proposed privatisation and to assess its merits for several years.

As the Minister for Corporate Affairs confirmed when he opened the debate—I am glad to see that he is still in the Chamber, albeit on the periphery—the Government have the advantage of a Coopers and Lybrand study commissioned in early 1988 and available since July 1988, which was just such a study of the merits of the proposed privatisation. We can be sure that that report has not been gathering dust for the past two and a half years, and that the Minister for Corporate Affairs—who has the reputation, justifiably or not, of being one of the cleverest people in the House—will have considered that report with great care.

The Minister will have considered not only the report's conclusions, but the wisdom of revealing those conclusions to the House. His study seems to come to one of two conclusions: either the rest of us are simply not fit to understand the conclusions reached by Coopers and Lybrand or the conclusions are so embarrassing that they should not be revealed to us because the embarrassment would be on the Government.

I asked the hon. Member for Surrey, North-West a straightforward question when he kindly allowed me to intervene in his speech. My question called for a yes or no answer: did Coopers and Lybrand express misgivings about the proposed privatisation and advise that, on balance, it should not proceed or did they not? Will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, when he responds to the debate—I am sure that he will do so in his customary robust and frank way—answer that question? His hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs inevitably raised suspicion, because he was fudging the issue and seemed incapable of answering any question with a direct yes or no answer.

Therefore, one is driven to the conclusion that the reason for the report's supression is that it advises against the privatisation. That leads us to the verdict that the privatisation is founded on prejudice. "Let us privatise what we can," says the Minister to himself, whether the merits favour it or not.

As a committed free marketeer, I am all in favour of privatising state-owned businesses when the merits are in favour; but equally, it does not serve the interests of the free market, and it certainly does not serve the interests of the privatised company, if the decision is based upon prejudice.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman develop his argument to the point where he explains why most of the board and the council of BTG appear to be in favour of such a move and the press have frequently offered BTG as a possible candidate for privatisation in order to allow it the international expansion which its natural role suggests?

Mr. Carlile: Unlike the Minister, I will answer the hon. Gentleman's question head on. There is a simple reason why the press has spoken of BTG as a candidate for privatisation. Any boring day of the news week when the press are looking around for something on which to comment, one of the first things that comes to mind is what the Government will think of privatising next. They look at the list of Government-owned businesses and, as BTG makes a profit and so, presumably, can be sold for a reasonable price, the press say that perhaps the Government will privatise BTG. The Government themselves have taken the same somewhat simplistic approach to the privatisation of BTG: because it makes a profit—because it moves, as it were—let us privatise it.

I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's first question as I proceed because, on the merits, there is no good case for privatising BTG. BTG has amassed quite a reputation for itself. It is a successful public sector company, albeit a small one. The Minister has asked rhetorically more than once today whether it matters if BTG is privatised, since the Government are increasing the amount of money that is being put into what he broadly describes as "this area", by which I presume he means the research and development of ideas. That is a fair point to make, but there is research and research, development and development, technology and technology.

As one university vice-chancellor has said, there is an acute gap in the market for relatively small, highly speculative investments. That is the type of highly speculative investment which almost every private finance house and private venture capital organisation would not consider. Yet that is precisely the type of project, and the small scale of funding involved is precisely the scale of funding, most often needed to take innovation from the experimental stage to a point at which its commercial potential can be seriously evaluated.

BTG has been almost alone in filling that gap. It is the only organisation which has made it its stock in trade, day by day, to be prepared to fill that gap. A reasonable concern is that a privatised BTG would be driven by short-term fimnancial objectives to withdraw from that area of the market. If it does so, it will be an entirely hit-or-miss operation for the inventor or entrepreneur as to whether he can develop and proceed with his invention.

Many entrepreneurs in the global village in which we live, certainly in the European village in which we live, would go elsewhere with their inventions because they might feel, with reasonable justification, that they were more likely to obtain the sort of venture capital and development support that they needed outside the United Kingdom than within the United Kingdom.

BTG has a valuable asset, but not in bricks and mortar; it is a portfolio which contains promising technologies, varying from voice recognition devices to combine harvesters. But many of them are still at the patenting stage, the early development stage, and are the intellectual property of their inventors, who have only laid the basic bricks of that property and still have a great deal more work to do.

The Minister tells us that the Government have decided to proceed with the privatisation at a stage when they do not know what form it will take, have no idea to whom the company will be sold, and have not decided what safeguards should be put in place to ensure that investment continues. He says that they are open-minded, which means that they have not made up their mind about a golden share, guarantees or foreign involvement. All those matters are up in the air. It will not be possible for the House to amend the Bill to deal with such issues in Committee because of its nature and shape.

We may find that BTG is privatised successfully in a financial sense, with plenty of other companies prepared to pay large sums of money for it, but they will be paying for the portfolio, a list of tradeable assets—patents which can be sold off, and technologies which can be dispersed undeveloped. There is no guarantee from the Government at this stage that anything will be done to preserve the value of that portfolio.

I venture to suggest that little can be done to preserve the value of the portfolio once it is dispersed. If it were to be done, the Government would have to develop a new body of law to protect certain aspects of intellectual property which would be inconsistent with the thorough-going and needed review of intellectual property law which the Government have already carried through Parliament.

Mr. Simon Hughes: As my hon. and learned Friend knows, I represent the constituency with the largest part of the British Technology Group. It is feared—I say this seriously to the Minister—that the collective expertise of the people working as a team is at risk. The management may consider that the group could do well in the private sector, but that does not explain why there cannot be complementary activity, some in the private sector, as happens now, which is perfectly justifiable, and some in the public sector, to do what the private sector either is not doing or will not do, or what it can do best. It is the Government's failure to address that aspect which has caused most of the employees to have no confidence in the Government's proposal.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; he has taken a great interest in BTG, which is in his constituency. A great and broad body of expertise has been built up within the group. As my hon. Friend will confirm, we are talking not merely about a group of technologists but about scientists, patent agents, lawyers and other experts in intellectual property, and financiers, people who understand venture capital, that most difficult thing to obtain at reasonable rates of interest in what is essentially a fee-generating City of London. As the Minister well knows, there is no interest in the City of London in developing new ventures; the interest at the moment is in churning out fees.

BTG is a multi-disciplinary body which has been working for Britain, trying to secure a real place in the world for Britain's young and vital technology. It has been fighting to ensure that we do not have the fiasco that occurred after the last war, when the patents that could have been obtained for the British discovery of antibiotics were not taken out and all comers were able to move in and make trillions of dollars out of British invention.

The BTG should stand independent of Government, although publicly funded. It is open to that body to sell parts of its portfolio or to license others to manufacture products that are part of its expertise. That must be right. In the end, however, there must be a Government-funded agency. There has to be an agency that is able to pick up those inventions which have the imagination that floors the City of London, but which the Government, with their necessarily patriotic view, will be prepared to back a little way, and then perhaps a little way more and so on, until one turns into the successor to the light bulb or the antibiotic. This will not happen if the BTG is taken into the private sector and nothing remains in the public sector to act as a longstop for the great inventiveness of British scientists, technologists and engineers.

Perhaps, if the Government had come to the House with much clearer proposals, and had been able to say that, while they were privatising the BTG, they were also establishing a structure to pick up the residue that needs to be dealt with in the public sector, we might have been able to support the Bill. As it stands, its proposals are too diffuse, because they have been motivated by the Government's prejudice in favour of privatisation rather than by an argument on the merits.

5.11 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) raised an interesting point about the Coopers and Lybrand report. If he were a Minister, would he be prepared to release confidential information that could be of use to the pharmaceutical industry, especially if, by doing so, he would destroy the independence of the organisation?

Mr. Alex Carlile: I did not argue that all the confidential information about pharmaceuticals should be released. I asked a specific question: did Coopers and Lybrand come down in favour of privatisation or against it? The House would find that answer to that question instructive.

Sir Trevor Skeet: The hon. Gentleman is asking for a little part of the report without the entire report. One may need to read the entire report before finding precisely the case that it makes.

The hon. and learned Gentleman also said that there was no case for privatisation. Let me give him some ideas. It is no longer appropriate for an international, commercially viable operation to be answerable to Ministers, civil servants and the Treasury. I agree that BTG grew up under an umbrella, that it was safeguarded and out of international competition. Now, we are moving into an era in which, if it is to expand, BTG will have to be privatised.

I have a second, compelling argument in favour of privatisation. Certain overseas Governments find the idea of a state-sponsored agency or company unacceptable. For example, when the French Government wanted some research to be handled by a United Kingdom agency, it refused to allow a Government-owned agency to carry it out. BTG did not get the contract. Is that of no significance? BTG proposed a joint venture with a Spanish firm. That required the approval of the Spanish Cabinet solely because the BTG had public sector status. Questions were not answered, and the whole project was abandoned. When BP was substantially nationalised, it tried to get certain licences in Turkey, but could not do so because it was a state enterprise with a large state investment. It will be hard for Opposition Members to deal with that point.

Mr. Simon Hughes: While there may be political reasons why another country does not wish to deal with a state-owned enterprise, no Opposition Member has argued that there should not be private sector activities developing British technology. There should be as much as there is now and more. We are arguing that there should also be a subsidiary state sector. Just as there is accountability for science and the arts, through funding from the Government, so such technology should have some Government link and direction.

Sir Trevor Skeet: I do not accept that. This is a viable company which has reached a point of maturity at which it should be put in the private sector because it is commercially oriented. If there were any other competitors, that would be the luck of the draw, but no specific provision should be made for that. We are told that the Labour party has its own ideas, but, like many of its other schemes, they will not work.

My third example concerns Government restraints. The size of group investments has to be scrutinised first by the Department of Trade and Industry, not by the board. Such matters should be decided at company level by BTG. Appointment to the top posts is settled by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Department monitors all BTG activities, as does the Treasury, and if the Treasury is short of cash, it can prune the group spending. BTG is required to pay a fixed percentage of profit to the Government. Operating profits after tax were £6·8 million and tax and dividends paid to the Government were £6·1 million. That is too heavy a burden for a new company, so it should be pared down in such a way as to leave sufficient resources for expansion. I should have thought that those points made it clear that it is essential that the company moves into the private sector.

I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery that the group has a valuable combination of professionals. No more than he does do I wish to see it broken up. I regard it as a centre of commercial excellence. I should not like to see it dismembered. There is a staff of 188, including six solicitors, two barristers, 18 patent agents plus two trainees, 15 financial managers, six of whom are on the venture capital side, and 60 specialists in technology transfer in the operating division, whether that is pharmaceuticals, engineering or anything else.

We must recognise that most large companies, such as ICI, Unilever, the Royal Dutch Petroleum and the Shell group, have a department through which they do their own patent and licensing business in-house. The big difference between BTG and these companies is that it specialises in dealing with all this expertise and sorts out patent and licence problems. I should not like to see it disintegrate, because it has an assembly of professionals. However, steps should be taken to release the enterprise from the restraints created by a too-close association with the state. I believe that many people will appreciate that point.

I have another reason for admiring the enterprise. It has an aggressive enforcement attitude to rights arising out of patents, particularly during the 1980s. Over the hovercraft, BTG filed an action in the United States and claimed compensation from the United States Government—the Pentagon—for infringement of the United States hovercraft patents. There was an out-of-court settlement, thanks to the persistence of the enterprise, of $6 million from the United States Government. That was an outstanding achievement, and I commend it.

Another case was nuclear magnetic resonance imaging. There was an out-of-court settlement by the United States health care group Johnson and Johnson for patent infringement. By taking aggressive action—as such a small company can—the group has built up its commercial reputation for independence and impartiality, and I should not like to see that destroyed. It has also used discretion in inter-corporation licensing.

The BTG has a broad network with universities—it has technical transfer agreements with 50 universities, plus one abroad, with 17 polytechnics, and with eight medical schools. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said that there were no consultations, but that is extraordinary coming from him, because none of the nationalisation proposals put forward by the Labour party have included consultation with the industries involved. Surely it is up to the Government to decide whether this industry continues to identify commercially useful ideas and to search out solutions with academic institutions and private and public sector research establishments. In 1990, its new business was made up of 46 per cent. from academic institutions, 12 per cent. from Government research bodies and 42 per cent. from the private sector. The group is increasing its work in the private sector and should therefore be considered a private sector enterprise.

The group also has a broad network of contact with research councils, for example with the Science and Engineering Research Council, which carries out much of its own work, but I daresay that that collaboration could be extended in future, and with the Medical Research Council, which largely deals with its own work but perhaps should delegate it to a private enterprise like BTG. The group also does most of the work of the Agricultural and Food Research Council. When its monopoly of work from Government-funded research was terminated in 1985 it was probably a good thing, and BTG has now recognised that fact.

I have been singing the praises of the enterprise and have given a pretty clear indication of why it should be commercialised in the true sense of the word. It is a unique institution, with few competitors. One competitor is the American Research Corporation in the United States, but that is much smaller and BTG has an affiliate there, which makes sense because in 1990 40 per cent. of its income came from the United States, 20 per cent. from Japan and 10 per cent. elsewhere abroad, with the balance of 30 per cent. in the United Kingdom.

There are few competitors in the United Kingdom. Oxford university carries out its own work. Impel Ltd. carries out work for Imperial college and 3i. Those are the only competitors in the United Kingdom, except for a large amount of in-house work carried out by some of our larger enterprises. France and Germany are untapped fields for the company. It is associated with Eurotech and with the European institute of technology and, because it is well dug in there, I envisage there will be every opportunity for moving ahead.

I have mentioned several ideas for how privatisation should be effected, but impartiality and independence are paramount and should be protected. Without them, the company would not be able to do work in the United

Kingdom and abroad. There is no reason why that work should not be continued if a suitable privatisation is carried out, which is what the Minister intends.

There must be some protection against asset stripping. Any industrialist would look at the group and think it was a good company to acquire. For example, it does a lot of work in pharmaceuticals and, if it were taken over, the company acquiring it would know all about its competitors and would have a long list of perhaps 8,000 patents, either in existence or being applied for. I suggest the following possible solutions. There could be a flotation through the stock exchange with the retention of a golden share, which would always be retained. There could be an allocation of shares to the staff and, as they would have an interest in the enterprise they would be loth to concede it to any foreign enterprise or to another company in the United Kingdom. The flotation could provide that no foreign company could take over a key industry to the United Kingdom. The allocation of shares could be limited to one shareholder, which would prevent sector domination, and I hope that the Minister will consider that. Also, the establishment of a trust has been mentioned and it is interesting to observe the analysis made in December 1988 that 50 per cent. of people interviewed were in favour of that. It would be for the Government to work out the type of trust.

The Government are wise to introduce the Bill in the way that they have done. They have set up a limited liability company, into which all the shares will go, and at a later date they will decide on one of the ideas that I have mentioned, or will perhaps select another. Then the company will be in the correct shape for privatisation.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): The hon. Gentleman was talking about the safeguards which he felt should be introduced. I hope that he will press them strongly on the Minister. However, he did not mention the patents held by BTG that have resulted from research in universities. Universities and individual academic inventors stand to receive royalties for many years to come. How does he propose to protect them?

Sir Trevor Skeet: They would be protected because they are subject to agreements at present. If inventions have been patented by BTG on behalf of universities or by the universities themselves the inventors will be safeguarded. I cannot see any great difficulty. The agreement could be transferred to another body that takes over the group.

There could be a case for an institutional purchase by a major finance house, which would maintain impartiality and the independence of its commercial operations. I suggest that the Minister might study that idea. Obviously there will have to be an independent show, which is not interested in any sector in particular. One could probably find the right solution along those lines.

Price Waterhouse is making a report on privatisation, which is probably the most advantageous way to proceed, and I shall be interested to read it.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman might not be allowed to read it if the precedent of the Coopers and Lybrand report is followed and it produces a conclusion but we never know what it is. Perhaps we shall all remain in the dark with the next report.

Sir Trevor Skeet: I think that the Government will release whatever information that they receive, provided that it is not confidential—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] If the report is confidential the information cannot be released—it would injure not the Government but the companies concerned, and they have clients who may be involved. It would be a good idea if Members of Parliament could read at length a report on methods of privatisation and study the recommendations made, so that they could make an accurate assessment. I believe that that is precisely what the Government will ensure.

The group has been working for some years, is viable and has been paying a lot of tax to the Treasury. It has international credit not merely in the United States but in Japan, India, the United Kingdom and many other counties. We wish it to continue. Now that it has reached the end of the springboard, it must go for further competition, and the only way in which it can do that is to become part of the private sector. The public sector contains too many restrictions and limitations, and foreign Governments may refuse to deal with bodies simply because they are state agencies.

I wish that Opposition Members would recognise the merits of the Government's proposal. That applies to the Liberals as well as Labour, but it is Labour that is thinking back 20 years. If it continues to think in that way, we shall never get ahead. I welcome the Bill and hope that it will have a very successful Committee stage.

5.30 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): It is evident, especially from what the Minister and his colleagues have said, that there is no clear demand for the Bill. We have been told that the council of BTG supports it, but that is not entirely surprising: for reasons that I do not fully understand, the council feels constrained by the Department of Trade and Industry. BTG seems to me to be operating perfectly well now, and it is certainly profitable. Where, then, is the demand for the Bill?

I shall not rehearse the arguments, but I believe that dogma is at the root of the legislation. It is likely to produce a much less effective private-sector successor, with consequent damage to technology transfer procedures and, equally important, a reduction in the protection available to patent holders.

In the past, the Government have cited as part of the rationale for their privatisations the need to reduce the drain on public resources when nationalised industries are inefficient and unprofitable. We have already heard that BTG in its present form is not only highly efficient but extremely profitable. Last year, it managed a profit of some £7 million on a turnover of £30 million—a good performance by any standards, and in itself an increase of some 24 per cent. on the previous year.

Nor can it be said that a sale would raise much for the Government coffers: being undervalued, it is likely to realise only £35 million to £45 million. We have often been told in the past that one of the Government's aims is the pursuit of a wider share-owning democracy. That aim will not be served by the Bill, which will not extend share ownership among the general public.

BTG makes no demands on the public purse; quite the opposite. It is accountable to the Secretary of State, but is entirely self-financing—which, I believe, is testament to its success. It continues to benefit from the fruits of its expert judgment, and that of its predecessor bodies, over the past 40 years.

[Mr. Mike Watson]

If the public or the national interest is to be served, BTG should remain in the public sector. When plans to privatise it in 1988 were announced, they provoked an outcry in the scientific and research establishment. Not only is there no demand for the privatisation; there has been an outcry in the world of academia and research. There are two main reasons for that. First, the bulk of BTG's income is derived from technology transfer, largely as a result of its having the flexibility to adopt a longer-term view based on technological as well as commercial judgments. By contrast, traditional venture capitalists seek shorter-term returns from equity investments.

BTG's profits are reinvested through research and investment—the seedcorn of the country's future. They are not paid out in dividends, apart from the amount that BTG is obliged to give the Government. That amount is, in any case, modest. BTG is not driven by the same considerations to which a private company is obliged to give precedence. For that reason, private-sector organisations are inhibited from underwriting the long lead-in times that are often necessary to allow a new product to develop and realise its commercial potential. The Minister ascribed no importance to that aspect, although I am sure that he is aware of it. Venture capitalists typically allow a lead-in time of five to seven years, although many inventions may require 10 to 15, especially in the pharmaceutical sector.

I have mentioned the importance of seedcorn capital. Writing in the *Financial Times*, David Sawers, an economic consultant, said:

"Most venture capital funds are looking for projects which involve limited technical risk, and can be evaluated primarily on commerical criteria . . . Fund managers accept that a gap exists in the supply of funds".

BTG has not filled that gap entirely, but it has gone much of the way towards filling it. If it ceases to exist—which is the aim of the Bill—the gap will widen, and many young researchers with good ideas capable of development may well be denied the opportunity to develop them.

The lead-in times that are often required are unlikely to attract shareholders; there must be more attractive options for those involved with venture capital. No less important, however, is the question of patent infringement. Scientific and academic opinion are united in the view that BTG will constitute a more formidable deterrent to patent infringement as a public-sector body than as a private company. As a private company, it would have little clout, and doubtless even less enthusiasm for protracted and inevitably costly legal action. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) mentioned BTG's pursuit of the Pentagon in a case not so long ago. It is surely inconceivable that a private company would be prepared to invest the money that it takes to pursue such actions.

Overseas predators, paying lip service to patented products, are likely to see the United Kingdom as a soft touch in future. That would leave our universities cruelly, indeed dangerously, exposed. What price multinational companies riding roughshod over academic and research institutions—particularly given the weak financial position in which many universities and research establishments now find themselves as a result of the Government's consistent underfunding over the past 10 years? They are simply not in a position to defend themselves if multinational companies choose to brush them aside and carry on regardless. That, too, represents a gap in the Bill, with which I hope the Secretary of State will deal.

Sir Trevor Skeet: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the inability of a private enterprise to proceed with infringement actions. Why should he come to such a conclusion, given that most of the litigation is now private in any event? When the political machine is behind something, it will impose all the inhibitions of politics. It is only because we have a good team here, working together, that this course is being taken. That team will be preserved in the new enterprise, and surely it will proceed with its litigation as it would be expected to do.

Mr. Watson: I did not say that companies were unable to proceed; I said that they would be very reluctant, because of the cost. A company taking over the complete portfolio of BTG might regard, for instance, magnetic resonance imaging as one of the lucrative aspects, and in that event it would clearly be worthwhile to pursue legal action. But, in many other instances, a Japanese or European company might choose to steal an invention, and the company that had bought BTG might decide that it was not worth its while to take legal action.

Over the years, BTG has forged a relationship with the academic establishment as well as with leading companies, which has ensured that the best of British research can be developed into marketable products. At a time when manufacturing industry is on its uppers, we need alternative sources for the future regeneration of British industry. It would be a tragedy if we closed any doors, because people with useful ideas could not see those ideas developed. I fear that that relationship between BTG and the academic and industrial establishments is likely to be destroyed if the privatisation goes ahead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East referred to the opposition of eminent researchers and industrialists. The *New Scientist*, a publication respected by many who are concerned with and for the British Technology Group, says:

"If the British Technology Group does go private, the Government will one day have to invent an organisation staffed by people with time to spare to wander through academic research laboratories—an organisation that can act at the cutting edge of innovation to promote ideas that are too tentative to attract hard-nosed investors."

That underscores my previous point regarding legal action.

The British Technology Group does an excellent job, as evidenced by its performance over many years. It makes profits. Far from using up public money, it contributes to public funds, albeit modestly. For the reasons that I have outlined, it should be allowed to continue to do its job. One should bear in mind the old maxim, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

5.40 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): The Opposition's attitude to the privatisation of the British Technology Group is based in part on the hope that BTG in the state sector could become the centrepiece of some type of interventionist industrial strategy. Opposition spokesmen often refer to the need for an industrial strategy, by which I assume that they mean more state

intervention—which of course means politicians and civil servants making the decisions about the British economy. It is too often forgotten that we have tried such industrial strategies before.

Industrial strategies such as those advocated by the Opposition were tried for about 35 years after the second world war. What did we get out of it? It led to a sorry array of industries—steel, coal, nuclear power, shipbuilding, cars and motor bikes—none of which was a paragon of industrial or economic success. When the previous Labour Government tried to create a rival for IBM through the vehicle of the National Enterprise Board, they sponsored an organisation called Nexos; that, too, was an abject failure. Before Nexos went bust, it had lost more than £30 million. Its main achievement was to import a large quantity of Japanese-made facsimile machines which, after Nexos went out of business, it sold for the sum of £1.

We have tried all that before and it has failed dismally, disastrously and abjectly. It is interesting to note that one of our most successful industries since the war has been chemicals and pharmaceuticals. That is one of the least subsidised industries.

Mr. Gordon Brown: They are two industries.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman says that they are two industries. Perhaps he is splitting hairs. For his information, chemicals and pharmaceuticals are closely linked. Some of our main chemical companies are also our main pharmaceutical companies. I refer to companies such as ICI.

Our chemical and pharmaceutical industries have been the least meddled with and the least subsidised since the war, yet they remain among our most successful. Two of the industries that have been most interfered with by politicians since the war are steel and aerospace. They lost their share of the international market until the beginning of the 1980s, but they regained a great deal of their market share during the 1980s. To a large extent, they were liberated from Government control, since when they have performed strongly.

The iron and steel industries, which had chronic trade deficits in 1980 after 30 years of meddling and interference by politicians, have made substantial surpluses since then. Last year, the British iron and steel industries registered a net surplus of £1 billion. British Steel is now recognised as one of the most efficient steel producers in the world.

Under the previous Labour Government, manufacturing output fell in the 1970s. When Labour's industrial planners were in charge of the economy—supposedly wedded to the great idea of a strong manufacturing industry—manufacturing output fell. Under a more free market economic regime in the 1980s, British manufacturing output increased faster than that of any other European country.

Mr. Rees: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that manufacturing investment did not fall greatly during the early years of this Government? If he says that manufacturing investment has increased, he must, according to the figures, have chosen a different base.

Mr. Oppenheim: I was referring to manufacturing output, not to investment. Manufacturing output in the 1980s—I accept that that is not the whole of the Government's period in office—rose faster than in any other European country. If we include 1979, manufacturing output increased by about 12 per cent., which was faster than the increase achieved by most other European countries. It was certainly faster than that achieved by the previous Labour Government, when manufacturing output fell.

If we consider the raw investment figures, it does not look as though it has increased very much in real terms. However, the quality of the current investment is much better. During the 1960s and 1970s, much of that investment was directed by civil servants and politicians and was wasted; money was invested in unwise projects. A great deal of the investment in the 1980s was of a far higher quality. Investments were made as a result of a myriad of market decisions. They tended, therefore, to yield better results. I suspect that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) would question that assertion.

Labour's magic solution for our industrial strategy is just as much a red herring now as it ever was. They want a return to the bad old days when politicians made decisions for business men, while preaching that profits are bad and have to be equated with greed or crude materialism. That is hardly likely to help British industry. Simplistic solutions, such as a Government-directed industrial strategy, have been tried before and have failed.

The extent to which such a solution persists in Opposition circles is based on a misreading of Japan's success. Many people hold the mistaken belief that Japan's industrial success is founded on a successful state-industry partnership, as embodied in Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry. MITI is not nearly so powerful as is made out by those who use the MITI myth as an excuse for their own failure, or to lobby for more subsidies or more protection at home. Many of Japan's most successful industries have completely shunned MITI interference. In the 1950s, for example, MITI tried to consolidate the Japanese car industry and to produce a people's car on the lines of the Volkswagen Beetle. That was a complete failure. None of the Japanese car companies agreed to co-operate with MITI. The record of the Japanese car industry since then speaks for itself.

Many of Japan's most successful industries have received little help or guidance from MITI. I could quote many examples, but three will be sufficient—photocopiers, excavators and motor bikes. All three have had little involvement with MITI. However, many of Japan's least successful industries have been the recipients of large amounts of MITI aid. A MITI-sponsored restructuring of the aluminium industry left it very weak internationally. Many point to the Japanese steel and shipbuilding industries as the supposed paragons of MITI's interventionist approach. However, when a team of economists visited Japan in 1968, at a time when its steel and shipbuilding industries were rapidly overhauling those of Western countries, they found that MITI's aid to the steel and shipbuilding industries was almost insignificant and that other factors, such as Japan's underlying structural competitiveness, accounted for their success.

Other industries where MITI supposedly had a large hand in Japan's success were computers and electronics, semiconductors and components. However, MITI's subsidies to those industries were minuscule compared with the overall research and development requirement of the companies involved. All the OECD, GATT and World bank reports show that Japanese subsidies to the electronics industry were lower than those for the

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electronics industries in Europe and the United States, where such subsidies have often been disguised in Pentagon or NASA budgets.

There are many reasons for the failure of interventionist policies. Far too often, decisions on whether to invest money are made for political rather than for commercial reasons. A classic example is the British steel industry since the war. In the early 1960s, a private sector steel company was told that it would be given a licence to build a plant in Wales only if it built part of the plant at Ravenscraig in Scotland.

Too often, when Government subsidies are about, it is the most powerful lobbyist—not the industries that really need the money—who gets the largest slice of the cake. Too often, the industries that are promoted by politicians are simply unsustainable for the underlying fundamentals of the economy. Quite often, they are simply too advanced.

I am thinking, for instance, of the attempt by the European Community to foster a semiconductor industry. So far, it has been an abject failure. It has swallowed vast sums of money, yet the European semiconductor industry, in international terms, is something of a joke. Too often, interventionism leads to the creation of national champions. They often have semi-monopolistic positions in their home markets, and the result is to divide up the overall market, leading to a plethora of national companies, very few of which are strong global competitors.

This, surely, is the story of intervention in Europe as a whole. Consider the electronics sector or even the car industry in Europe. Over the years, almost every European Government have played the game of subsidising, aiding and protecting their national car industries. National car industries, national steel industries and national electronics industries in Europe have fairly strong positions in their home markets, yet Europe as a whole has very few international players.

Above all, intervention and subsidies almost always lead to misallocated investment and wasted resources—resources that could better be employed elsewhere in the economy. Consider, for example, the huge sums of money and the huge amounts of skilled manpower that were invested in Britain's nuclear power programme in the 1950s and 1960s in an attempt to build an indigenous nuclear power capacity to rival that of the Americans. At the time, everyone knew that it would be cheaper to buy American technology. One must ask how much more good the vast resources and the investment in highly skilled manpower that went into that project could have done if market forces had directed them elsewhere in the economy.

Those are the reasons for the failure of interventionist policies. I urge hon. Members who may be inclined to point mistakenly to the supposed successes of interventionist policies in Japan to point, instead, to the failures of interventionism elsewhere. When I say that, I am not referring just to the eastern bloc. A sorry array of developing countries thought that the way to industrial and economic success was to have a centrally planned and controlled economy, with politicians, rather than business men, making the decisions. All those countries are now paying the price.

Consider the disastrous state of the Brazilian and Indian economies. Consider the way in which Brazil and India have tried to build indigenous computer companies, to develop space programmes and to engage in other types of nonsense. In those cases, the failure of interventionism is very stark. Having politicians make decisions that business men should be making leads to complete misallocation of resources, and that harms the overall economy.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my hon. Friend agree that Brazil is now taking our route—reducing interventionism and encouraging foreign investment with no strings attached?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is right. I am full of admiration for President Collor and what he is trying to do in terms of liberalising the Brazilian economy, tearing down trade barriers—Brazil was one of the most protectionist countries in the world—encouraging foreign investment and the internal economy and privatisation. I am also full of admiration for the way in which he is combining that with a strong environmental policy aimed at maintaining the Amazon rain forest and looking after the rights of the Indians. Truly, President Collor is a great man, but he is struggling with all the vested interests and all the heavy baggage of Brazil's industrial and economic history. Looking at Brazil's present position, I fear that his plan may fail, simply because the burden of the past is far too great. I wish him the best of luck, and I certainly hope that he will succeed.

My hon. Friend's intervention came at an opportune time. I was just about to say that, bearing in mind the almost indecent haste with which central planning is being abandoned all over the world—not just in the eastern bloc, but in countries such as Brazil and even, to an extent, India—the Opposition might finally have got the message and might have dropped their predilection for interventionist policies and industrial strategies. That is not to say that there are not lessons to be learnt from countries like Japan and Germany, which are sometimes wrongly held up as being interventionist paradises. There are lessons to be drawn from Japan and Germany. However, the contention that those countries have succeeded as a result of interventionist policies is simply wrong.

Certainly there is plenty that Governments can do to help their economies. For one thing, both Japan and Germany have excellent, although not expensive, education systems. Clearly, in this country we have much to do to gear our education system more closely to the needs of industry. That is something that the Government can do. On the surface, it appears that Labour have grasped how crucial to the economy is a successful education system. However, their answer is simply to throw more money at education. That ignores the fact that the Japanese spend less per pupil than we do, yet their results are far better.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the education system in Germany reflects what we started to have—technical schools, grammar schools, and so on—and that that is precisely what Labour, when in power, have tried by every means to eradicate?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Indeed, the parallel could be extended to Japan.

Germany and Japan both have two-tier education systems and there is no in-built bias against vocational education such as one so often encounters in this country. In academic circles there is no snobbery regarding vocational education. There are, of course, other reasons for the success of German and Japanese education. One is the concentration on literacy in science and maths, and another is that children there work 42 to 50 per cent. longer hours than do children here. We can learn many lessons from their highly successful education systems.

The point that I was making is that throwing more money at education, in an attempt to gear it better to our economic system, is unlikely to succeed. That ignores the fact that the least successful education authorities—least successful in terms of results—are those that spend the most money. Incidentally, all those are Labour-controlled. I do not see how appointing peace studies inspectors, or keeping one quarter of total funds back for central administration, or packing school governing bodies with political supporters of the local council, all of whom have an innate hostility to industry, or having economics teachers who preach the supremacy of socialism, is the way to gear our education system to the needs of industry.

Another lesson that we can learn from the Japanese and the Germans is that public spending must rise in line with what the nation can afford, and that encouraging savings is a good way to bear down on over-consumption and inflation and, at the same time, help to provide a pool of capital for industry. Unfortunately, everything in Labour's policies—from the investment income surcharge to the encouragement of high-spending, low-performance, left-wing education authorities—demonstrates that they have not yet grasped this fundamental truth.

The Opposition spokesman claimed that his opposition to the privatisation of BTG was to a large extent based on the need to retain a Government-run research base in Britain. I contend—although I accept that this is not a very fashionable view—that lack of research is not our problem. It is worth remembering that Britain is still a net exporter of industrial technology licences. Japan and Germany, on the other hand, are still net importers of industrial technology licences. We need not so much to improve our research and development as to improve our production and marketing capabilities. The best research and development in the world does not do much good if one cannot produce the goods properly and get them to the market effectively.

Here again, we can learn lessons from the Japanese experience. It is worth remembering that in the early years of Japan's industrial development, the Japanese were major purchasers of industrial licences. That was often sneered at as being simply copying, but it helped the Japanese to develop extremely fast. It also allowed them to concentrate more of their resources on production and marketing. Of course, as Japan became more powerful as an economy in the 1960s and 1970s, it moved on from simply copying or reproducing western products to improving those products, and in the 1980s, as it became the leading economy, it started to innovate far more and to conduct far more of its own research.

The same happened in the United States. In the early phase of industrial development in the 19th century, it was sneered at by the British as being a mere copier, but the Americans, in turn, moved from being mere copiers to being improvers, and eventually became great innovators—and now, in their turn, they sneer at the Japanese as copiers.

The cycle of economic development for nations in terms of technology and research goes from copying to improving and then to innovating. It is natural for an economy at the top of the scale to innovate. For an economy such as Britain's, which is trying to grope its way back to some sort of industrial respectability after many decades of abject decline, it is important to spend more of its resources on improving manufacturing and marketing rather than on basic research, much of which, historically, has been exploited by other countries because our manufacturing production and marketing capabilities have not been as strong as they should have been, despite some major improvements in the past decade.

Far more important than a state-sponsored research body is to encourage industry to look further afield and be more prepared to buy in licences from abroad and be more open-minded about buying in technology from overseas. The "not made here" attitude that has characterised much of British industry since the war and led industry to be less than open-minded about foreign technology has done our industry a great deal of damage and shows that the need for a state-run research body is extremely dubious.

The Opposition spokesman said that he would not renationalise BTG if Labour came into office. If that is the case, why do the Opposition oppose its privatisation? I believe that this is part of a sorry charade of inconsistency by the Opposition. They have opposed every privatisation programme put before the House by the Government. Yet companies such as Amersham International, Rolls-Royce and British Airways have proved that they can be far more effective international competitors in the private sector.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Surely there is no mystery about why the Labour party is opposing this measure, as it has opposed every other privatisation measure. The reason was made clear in a statement by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). On BBC's "On the Record" on 17 September 1989, he said that the Labour party is against all privatisations because they provide for the element of private profit-making. That has always been the basis of its position. Presumably the Labour party is against anyone making any profits out of anything.

Mr. Oppenheim: There seems to be a dichotomy in the Opposition's attitude. They are always telling us that our industry must do better and that they believe in manufacturing, but there is still an inbuilt bias in the attitude of many Opposition spokesmen—not all, since some of them have come on recently—against profit, which they equate with greed and crude materialism. It emanates from their view that human nature is perfectible and that anyone who moves away from their idea of the perfect society should be discouraged and kept down. They seem to believe that politicians and civil servants should make all the decisions.

The Labour party should look at successful economies such as Germany and Japan where there is no inbuilt hostility to money-making, business, commerce and profit. They do not have the outdated 19th-century attitudes that still permeate the British Labour party.

As I said, the Opposition have opposed every privatisation measure, but companies such as Amersham

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International, Ross-Royce and British Airways have proved that they can be more effective in the international marketplace when freed from the control of politicians and civil servants. None of those companies has asked to go back into state ownership. All over the world, countries are not nationalising their industries but privatising them. They are not increasing state intervention in industry, but reducing it. It is sad that the Opposition spokesman and Opposition Members in general have not yet learnt that fundamental lesson.

6.4 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): If I were an employee, perhaps an engineer, of the British Technology Group listening to the debate, I would think that there was a great philosophical political debate going on above the head of my organisation. The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) made some perfectly valid and pertinent points about comparison between us and Japan and Germany, and so on. However, we are not talking about just another public sector industry. We are not talking about the steel industry, the coal industry or a company such as Cable and Wireless which, as part of the manufacturing sector, happened to be in public ownership. We are talking about a unique institution which, to use the words available to every hon. Member in the first sentence of the note provided by the House of Commons research staff, is the world's leading technology transfer organisation.

BTG is one of the bodies created intentionally by the Government as an amalgamation of organisations in the public sector to do a specific job. BTG's job is to be a bridge between science, learning and invention and manufacturing, production and economic success. The argument about whether it should be in the public or private sector does no justice to the correct analysis of the role and function of BTG which is that it is there to provide a particular form of assistance so that the private sector can do its job properly. It is there so that science and invention can pass on, through a group of people with expertise, the ability to make us successful, whether we sell our licences to this country or abroad. Therefore, the great polemical debate is out of place.

I hold no brief for a general renationalisation or public ownership programme that may or may not be advanced by the Labour party at the next election. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and I, together with all our other colleagues, do not have a partisan public/private sector view. We do not have a dogmatic view about whether things are better in the public or private sector since this depends on all sorts of circumstances. We are not against the idea that the market place is usually the best way for corporate enterprise to succeed. However, we are talking today about a different and unique body. If we focus our attention on the nature of BTG, we can begin to address its concerns and the concerns of many others about its future if it takes the path that the Government have charted for it in the Bill.

The Minister prayed in aid the support for privatisation of the senior management of BTG against the wishes of the majority of its work force. The parallel that suggested itself to me was the recent example of the popularity among a small minority of people in certain sections of the health service for self-government of hospitals within the national health service, against the view of the majority of the work force who would rather the hospitals remained integrated as part of the local district health authority.

I understand that there may be a view within the management of BTG which says, "We think that we can go out into the big wide world and, because we are already profitable and successful, we can go on being more profitable and successful." However, there are other considerations which I hope that the Ministers will address. To be honest, I have not heard them adequately addressed yet. I was sad about the Minister for Corporate Affairs' speech. He is capable of making an intelligent and cerebral speech, but he made a party political knockabout speech, which belittled his intelligence and the importance of the issue.

The first matter—I shall be brief because this was dealt with by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery and in exchanges across the Floor—is that the Government have not come clean about the advice that they have been given. It appears that the advice that they have been given internally is in favour of keeping BTG in the public sector.

It also appears from the partial consultative exercise with the universities, that they also do not want a privatised BTG in the form envisaged by the Government. The Under-Secretary quoted the majority view of the universities and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. A majority of them wanted BTG to continue as a private foundation or trust—as a special body in which they conjointly had an interest and which would act as the technology arm to which their research activities could be linked. The universities did not argue for the wholesale divorce of BTG by letting it go off into the private sector sea to be bounced around and bought and sold by whoever came along under whatever conditions were imposed, let alone while we have not heard of those conditions because the Government have no idea about them.

Next, the hon. Member for Amber Valley considered whether we should tie up significant public funds in an organisation that could function equally well in the private sector. He knows—as does anybody else who has considered the issue—that we are not talking about large amounts of public sector funding or about the Government pouring enormous sums into this particular pit, let alone into a bottomless, non-profit-making pit which is a drain on the economy.

It is exactly the reverse. BTG's total income last year was £29·5 million. The operating profit after tax was just short of £7 million. Of course there is a drain if it must pay off a certain amount to the Government. It has to pay a significant amount and that may be an argument for changing that relationship. The £6 million which is siphoned off may be able to be put to better use, but that is not an argument for saying that it is a big drain when looked at as a whole or that it is a loss-making enterprise. It is not. It is successful and we are talking about relatively small amounts of money if we consider the public exchequer expenditure overall.

If we bear that in mind, the argument should not be whether to cast off BTG and let it go unprotected into the private sector or whether it stays where it is. We could properly debate alternative models for BTG. Certainly, my colleagues and I would not argue against that approach, although there are certain criteria that must be fulfilled before we would be happy about any new model.

The Government have commissioned a study, the conclusions of which they have not shared with us, so this is a debate in the dark. We conclude, therefore, that the reason that BTG is on the agenda is that it has been spotted as a remaining public sector enterprise about which the Government have a straightforward and dogmatic view. That is the only justification.

The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) is, coincidentally, a constituent of mine and a near neighbour of the BTG's headquarters at the Elephant. He has an interest in this debate and I shall be brief in order to allow him to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He asked one of the most pertinent questions: how do we know that the new regime will guarantee the three Is that he identified, of which I shall mention just two —the integrity, and independence of the enterprise that the BTG has been? We are worried that Britain will lose a resource which is currently so successful because it has the confidence of scientists and of inventors. Those people can go in confidence to BTG knowing that their ideas will be respected and not be at risk of being exploited or put into the private sector without the protection that they seek.

The danger of the loss of independence is that the supply of ideas and inventions will cease. That is obvious. If the new regime does not have the same integrity and if scientists and inventors do not believe in it as a body in the scientific and research technology world, they will not use it. They will not supply the ideas and inventions as they have in the past.

The BTG is trusted not to disclose ideas to other people. It is trusted not to pinch ideas and to pretend that they belong to someone else or to sell them at a profit. It is trusted to give a good technical assessment of an idea. It is trusted to ensure that the procedure for licensing the technology will work and will be carried out effectively.

As BTG is in the public sector, there can be no conflict of interest. In the private sector, there is bound to be such a conflict. Yesterday for the first time I visited, relatively privately, one of the private hospitals that have sprung up in my constituency. It is opposite Guy's hospital. It is important to see what is happening. The private sector must have a conflict of interest about where it takes its patients from or what it does to maximise its profits, because it is a profit-making enterprise. If a body is in the private sector and has a profit-making motive, there will be conflicts of interest—whether to maximise profits or to maximise investment and research, and we risk losing the technological advantages that BTG has had.

Will people have the same confidence in a profit-orientated private sector company that they currently have in a commercial but non-profit orientated company which is in the public sector and seen to be accountable to Parliament? Clearly one must at least be sceptical, and the probable answer is no.

Another concern is that there is a special relationship between BTG and the science funding organisations, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet). The logic of his intervention would be to privatise the research councils. There would be no merit in keeping any agency close to Government to ensure that activities of scientific research and of technological importance were carried out. I heard the rather unusual view of the hon. Member for Amber Valley that Britain should reduce the amount of its research, not increase it.

Mr. Oppenheim: No.

Mr. Hughes: I listened carefully. He argued that we should concentrate on manufacturing and production rather than on funding research which is then used abroad. I am not against concentrating on manufacturing and production, in which we have been weak, but I dissent strongly from the view that we can afford to reduce the amount of research carried out in Britain, let alone non-private-sector-led research.

One of the greatest problems that the scientific research community continually bemoans is the fact that scientific research in Britain is too demand led by the private sector and that there is too little blue sky research. Pure research is now at a premium in terms of funding. We risk creating the same problem in the context of technology that we already have in purely scientific research. This is a problem which we should address now rather than bemoan later.

Another of the merits of an organisation such as BTG has been that it has been a long-term institution. It has supported people for two, four, six, eight, or 10 years to develop their ideas to fruition. Sometimes a good idea can take eight or 10 years before it generates profits and may need experts working together to support it from its original concept to exploitation. In the private sector, the danger would be that long-term, difficult ventures would not be supported. The private sector would go for short-term profits. There would be no guarantee of long-termism. Additionally, all the factors that have been built up as a support—the additional education given to researchers in BTG, the benefit of a cross-relationship between people from different disciplines working together in a sort of technological hothouse—are at risk of being lost.

The real threat to BTG is that the Government would take a dogmatic view if the Bill were passed. Parliament would enable it to be sold. We would have no guarantee that we should retain close to the Government or to the public sector anybody at all to be accountable to Parliament and to carry on the work which, according to any record or assessment, has been extraordinarily successful. Why on earth are we running the risk of throwing away what has proved itself an eminently successful, complementary part of Britain's industrial, technological and scientific activity in the past 20 or 30 years?

There have been many failures in industrial terms, but BTG has not been one of them. It has been one of our successes and it has brought about many of our successes. It seems folly to throw away a proven success for a future that is, at best, extremely uncertain.

6.19 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I am in something of a dilemma. I appreciate the arguments put so effectively by many of my hon. Friends, and I apologise to a couple of them whose contributions I missed—especially my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), whose approach, I suspect, is similar to mine.

On the one hand, it seems to me to be eminent good sense to privatise BTG. We have heard from a number of hon. Members just how unnecessary many of the bureaucratic regulations are. It seems quite unnecessary, for example, that BTG should have to go to Ministers in respect of certain levels of investment and to have its appointments approved. Also unnecessary is the general

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involvement of Government officials in scrutinising BTG and so on. BTG should simply be getting on with making sound academic and commercial judgments.

On the other hand, Opposition Members—and, I suspect, my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North—have made valid points about the national interest. Collectively, Britain has been under-investing in research—I stress the word "research". I fully accept the central point of my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) that, in many respects, there is no point in researching unless one can develop products from one's research. Nevertheless, the research itself is fundamental.

As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) pointed out, one must strike a balance between blue sky research and research that is directly industry-driven. That balance was skewed the wrong way, and the Government have rightly tried to swing it back to ensure that there is more industry-related research. There is a huge investment at stake, and in the past we were simply not using our talents as well as we should have been in the generation of products. We have an unrivalled Nobel-prize-winning record, yet many of the breakthroughs that we were achieving were being developed elsewhere—notably in Japan.

The Government have established various means of getting the higher education institutions and research establishments to relate more closely to industry and to discover what industry wants. The LINK initiative immediately springs to mind. We have also encouraged universities to develop science parks. Moreover, as I said in an earlier intervention, most universities now have their own company structure through which to try to exploit their research efforts and patents and that has been very valuable. But we cannot swing the balance wholly in favour of near-market research. There is still a vital need for blue sky research—research driven by the exigencies of the research programme and the ideas of those pursuing it which, throughout our history, has thrown up breakthroughs that are directly relevant to product development that no one initially foresaw.

We have under-invested in relation to our major competitors—notably the Japanese and Americans. A high percentage of our research investment is geared to the military—a consideration that the Japanese do not have. In large measure because of the short-termism of the City's outlook, British industry has shown an unwillingness to invest in its own plant and research facilities, just as it under-invests in training. Since the war, we have had a history of economic cycles and, in periods of downturn, when management rightly have to cut their overheads, the two first victims tend to be training and research.

As a result, whereas we have remained fairly static in terms of civil research investment, our competitors have steadily moved ahead. One can look for figures that approximate our research effort to those of our competitors and compare percentages of GDP, but even in those terms the gap is widening. Our economy has not done terribly well; percentages of GDP hide the real truth —that, in absolute terms, the amount of cash that we invest is much smaller than that invested by Japan, the United States and even Germany.

That problem must somehow be addressed. The Japanese and the Americans are trying to establish increased collaboration between the academic, higher education and research worlds and companies. The promotion of such collaboration was precisely the role conceived for BTG—or its predecessor body—which was to act as a sort of academic broker. When the group was first launched—at a time when there was a shortage of all the other initiatives to which I have referred—it was the only body that was pretty close to industry and knew some of the directions in which industrialists wished to develop products. The group could scour the higher education markets to find out where research was being done and then establish the extent to which potential development from it was possible.

Most of our major competitors do that in one way or another. The Japanese economy is driven by huge corporations which are ruthlessly competitive, even within the electronics and car industries. Nevertheless, when the Select Committee on which I have the pleasure to serve went to Japan to look at the information technology industry, we found that, in all sorts of different ways—some direct and some indirect—the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry encouraged pre-competitive research effort and collaboration. In the light of that, the United States has had to encourage its companies to engage in pre-competitive research collaboration.

The decision to privatise BTG does not mean that there is not a need for Government, industry and research establishments to work together under partnership arrangements that enable them to make the best use of the limited investment available. On the other hand, Opposition Members are to prone to confuse mission and ownership. I remember vividly our arguments about the polytechnics. For more than a dozen years, I argued that polytechnics should be removed from local authority control and made part of our national investment in higher education. We heard the parrot cry from Opposition Members that the distinct mission of the polytechnics was to relate closely to their local communities and to serve the requirements of local commerce and industry. Opposition Members said that the polytechnics should be owned by the local community—in other words, the council.

That is nonsense and has been shown to be nonsense. Universities, which were not owned by councils, engaged in distinctive local community activities and served local industry. Leeds university is an example. Moreover, since the polytechnics have been removed from councils' control, they have continued to be geared primarily to the local community. There is no reason at all why BTG should not continue to be the academic broker that it has always been. The academic community has trusted BTG with its ideas in the past. Why should it not continue to do so? It is conceivable that one of the options that the Government will consider is a management buy-out. If that happens, BTG will have the same people, and largely the same approach, and it should command the same trust.

The brokerage role is very important, but it could be even more important. I would expect the BTG in the private sector not just to tap the brilliance of our own research effort but to open itself to a wider range of partnerships, enabling it to tap into research elsewhere in the world.

I do not know whether hon. Members mentioned the two notable examples during my absence from the

Chamber. Because the BTG is a state corporation, it was prohibited from having access to French research endeavours. The French Government did not want the British Government to get their hands on projects that they were funding. As we all know, there was an attempt to establish a joint venture agreement with a Spanish company to tap in to research there. That was exactly what should have been done. British industry should have access to the research effort worldwide. The Spanish Cabinet became involved in the negotiations, and the whole thing fell flat.

There are perfectly sound reasons why the brokerage role could be even greater and more successful for Great Britain Ltd. if BTG were privatised, provided that it is not sacrificed on the anvil of total free market forces and, as soon as it is privatised, a large predator does not come along with the narrow, short-termist thinking which prevails so often in the City. It could buy it up and then either wipe it out of existence or divert it into some other international conglomerate's interest. That predator could be a Japanese bank. It has already been said that BTG should not become locked into a particular part of its activities. For example, the group has a wide range of connections and partnership arrangements with the pharmaceutical industry. Clearly it would be wrong for one company to be allowed to buy up the group.

I finish with this plea. We must examine the options for the privatisation format—a trade sale, a management buy-out, or a consortium, which was mentioned earlier. I should like to know exactly what a consortium would entail. I foresee that the best solution would be to put the group in the private sector, with strict guarantees for all academics who have patents with it already, so that the present arrangements are not at risk.

There should be guarantees that the present relationship, partnership and trust with the academic world will remain, so that exploitation and transfer of technology can continue. We could also consider a Government golden share, at least for a short time, so that the trust can be maintained and people abroad can see that the group is not vulnerable to immediate takeover by predators. French and German companies, for example, or the German Government could then believe that we had a respected body which was not Government-owned but was Government-protected. Companies or Governments would then be more ready to participate in collaborative efforts on research initiatives. If we can establish a framework which gives those guarantees, the university world, the industrial world and Britain as a whole will benefit.

6.32 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): I have listened with great interest to the speeches of Opposition Members this afternoon. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) made thoughtful speeches, which added to the opening remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) many questions which the Government must answer. I shall pass mercifully over most of the speeches made from the Conservative Benches. Words such as "banal" flitted through my mind as I listened to them, but perhaps it would be more merciful not to allocate the term to any individual.

Yesterday I read an interesting snippet in one of the newspapers. It gave a quote from a Conservative Member of the European Parliament, Lord O'Hagan. He referred to "Calibans of the intellect" on the right wing of his party. Until I heard the Minister's speech today, I wondered exactly what Lord O'Hagan had in mind, but it is all much clearer now.

The Government have presented a pretty thin case for privatisation. We can see why the Secretary of State conveniently chose not to introduce the Bill, but to absent himself from the premises. Clearly, one debate this month with my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East was enough for him.

Instead of using the generous time available to him to present a coherent case, the Minister for Corporate Affairs spent his time largely on childish abuse. In doing so, he gained no respect for his superficial and flippant attitude to a serious issue.

As today's debate draws to a close, it is worth taking a few moments to reflect on the statutory function of the British Technology Group, as laid down in the Development of Inventions Act 1967. They are:

> "(a) securing, where the public interest so requires, the development or exploitation of inventions resulting from public research . . .
>
> (b) acquiring, holding, disposing of and granting rights (whether gratuitously or for consideration) in connection with inventions resulting from public research . . .
>
> (c) promoting and assisting, where the public interest so requires, research for satisfying specific practical requirements brought to the knowledge of the Corporation, where they are of opinion that the research is likely to lead to an invention; and
>
> (d) assisting, where the public interest so requires, the continuation of research where it appears to the Corporation that the research has resulted in any discovery such that the continuation may lead to inventions of practical importance."

Those four points outline the importance of the national interest in the debate today, an importance which was not properly touched on by the Government. Assuming that those remain the key objectives of the British Technology Group, it is surely up to Ministers to show why those objectives would be better served in the private sector and how they propose to safeguard them. The comments made so far have sadly been of little help.

For example, in the interview with *The Observer* to which my hon. Friend referred, the Secretary of State said:

> "The bureaucratic constraints which inevitably impose themselves on statutory bodies are preventing BTG from achieving its full potential. The Government's objectives are to ensure that more, and stronger links are forged between industry and science."

What bureaucratic constraints cannot be removed? How will privatisation of BTG strengthen links between industry and science?

Sadly, the substitution of dogmatic assertion for clear argument is all too typical of Ministers today. That is why they have failed to convince anyone of the necessity for or the validity of privatisation. They have failed to convince the vast majority of the staff of BTG. They have failed to convince inventors, whose patents are handled by BTG. They have failed to convince eminent scientists working in research. They have failed to convince financial observers. I refer the Minister for Corporate Affairs to comments made when privatisation was first mooted two years ago to

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

back up the assertion that privatisation was necessary. They have certainly failed to convince, and in this instance also failed to consult, the vice-chancellors and principals of the universities.

The Government have even failed to convince their own advisers. Despite their reticence, we know that Ministers were advised in 1988 that BTG would be better left in the public sector. That is why they have refused to publish any part of the report. It was not because of any issue of commercial sensitivity or anything else: it was merely that the conclusions of the report are inconvenient to Ministers. How, otherwise, can it be right to privatise now, when venture capital is scarce, rather than two years ago, when it was still plentiful?

It is not as if the alternative of a private company has not been tried before by the Government. In the mid-1980s, the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), impatient with what he regarded as the inefficiency of BTG in the public sector, set up Defence Technology Enterprises to capitalise on innovatory ideas in his field. The money was provided, somewhat reluctantly, partly by BTG and partly by private institutions. The company came back to the funders for more money a year later. It came back again a year after that. By that time, BTG had had enough and said, "No thanks, we are not putting up any more money."

Two years after it had been set up, Defence Technology Enterprises folded, unable to cope with the twin problems of under-capitalisation and the demand from City investors for an immediate return on their money. Is that what the Government have in mind today for the British Technology Group?

I wish briefly to recap on the reasons why we oppose the sale of BTG. We do not believe that the traditional arguments which the Government advance in favour of privatisation hold in this case. There will be no extension of share ownership. The shares are worth only about £35 million, assuming that the Government abstract the £20 million-worth of working capital which BTG must retain in order to function. I can hardly see the Government selling that off. Little revenue will accrue to the Treasury. The costs of the sale are already substantial and are likely to go up still further. Opportunities for competition after privatisation are likely to decrease rather than increase. There is not the slightest justification for the sale on grounds of efficiency, because BTG is already highly profitable in the public sector.

It is in the national interest to have a public sector body to take responsibility for developing ideas from publicly financed universities and polytechnics. It has a crucial role, as it allows a long-term view of projects to be taken. The sale of BTG represents the Government's abandonment of one of the few examples of long-term thinking within their Administration—BTG will be abandoned to a market that acts as though it is unaware of the meaning of that phrase.

BTG owns a stock of 8,500 patents, and the cost of renaming them will be enormous—again, a waste of money. It regularly takes legal action against people who infringe its patents, but that may not necessarily be true of a private company that is constrained by the demands of its shareholders for a return on their investment.

Perhaps the most important reason for opposing privatisation now is the one that made the Government refrain from privatising two years ago—the many conflicts of interest and problems that will beset the Government when they try to sell the company. Those problems were highlighted in the report to the Government by their advisers. I am certain that no sensible person would be in favour of a single large company being given the go-ahead to buy BTG, although some might be attracted by that idea. There is nothing in the Bill to suggest that the Government have found a way out of their dilemma.

I have listened in vain for the slightest logical justification for the proposed privatisation of BTG. That absence has led me to the inescapable conclusion that, once again, dogma has triumphed over reason, prejudice over good sense.

It is no accident that BTG has flourished in the public sector. The translation of new ideas into successful products and techniques is a long, hard process beset by disappointment and frustration. That task needs patience and the ability to see beyond the next quarter's figures or the next year's dividend.

A consideration of the range of products and inventions with which BTG is now presently associated gives one some idea of the hard task undertaken by it. In science, it is considering assays of blood constituents and the production of monoclonal antibodies. In materials technology, one of the key areas of development today, it is considering the production of high-performance plastic fibres. It is also involved with the development of advanced semiconductors. Its pharmaceutical work includes the development of anti-cancer drugs, various pain killers and the therapeutic use of monoclonal antibodies. BTG is also responsible for a wide range of potentially beneficial products in engineering and electronics.

A long-term approach is sadly lacking in most sectors of British industry. Perhaps I have a biased view, as I worked for several years for the pharmaceutical industry, which is the best exponent of such an approach.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Glaxo, Smith and Nephew, and Beecham are in the private sector. If such companies can undertake such long-term work—the hon. Gentleman has already acknowledged that—why not put BTG in the private sector as well?

Dr. Moonie: Obviously Conservative Members have no idea what early technology transfer is about, so it is difficult to convince them of the difficulties of operating in such work. BTG undertakes much of its work before there is any evidence that a specific product is likely to be successful. It takes out patents in no secure knowledge that there will be a return on them. It must look 10 or 15 years ahead.

The pharmaceutical industry may undertake such long-term work, but pharmaceuticals represent just one sector of BTG work, which covers every area of invention. I do not want to repeat myself, but I have already cited the number of sectors in which BTG is involved. I do not believe that researchers or other companies would be happy if a company owned by another pharmaceutical firm, however reputable, took over their ideas and developed them. Those other companies would have taken leave of their senses if they welcomed such a change; that is why so many of them are opposed to BTG going into the

private sector. It should remain where it has carried out its job efficiently and well for many years—it should remain in the public sector.

By privatising BTG, the Government have confirmed that they are incapable of seeing the value to our nation of such an asset. I hope that, on reflection, they will think again. The privatisation of BTG is being carried out merely for privatisation's sake, despite the damage that that will cause to British industry, science and technology. That is why we shall oppose the Bill.

6.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): Let me deal with the essence of the debate: should BTG be privatised? Should it operate fully within the stimulus and realities of market conditions, or should it be used as an instrument of state intervention?

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) should know that Britain's total research and development effort amounts to £6·9 billion spent by industry and £4·5 billion spent by the Government. A total of £11·4 billion is spent on research and development. Last year, the research spend of polytechnics and colleges amounted to £1·5 billion, while BTG's spend on projects and patents was a mere £11 million. The House should set the debate in proper context—BTG spends £11 million, while the value of total research effort in this country is equivalent to more than £11 billion. Those figures suggest that BTG's contribution amounts to less than one tenth of 1 per cent. of total United Kingdom spend on research and development and less then 1 per cent. of the moneys available to its traditional inventive resources——

Mr. Watson: Why the fuss to privatise BTG?

Mr. Leigh: It is the Opposition, not us, who are making the fuss.

BTG has a staff of just 188 and a turnover of £30 million a year and by most estimates it would rank as a small to medium-sized enterprise.

In 1985 BTG lost the right of first refusal of public sector inventions and with it inventors lost what they considered to be an implied right that BTG should exploit their inventions. Now the whole purpose of BTG is to turn inventions into profit. It is a commercial company.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) got it right—BTG is primarily a patent-creating mechanism to defend ideas in the increasingly predatory international marketplace. BTG chooses inventions and exploits the science base for one purpose only—profit. BTG, having chosen and patented a product, negotiates the sale and licences it with revenue-sharing agreements.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery made a characteristically frank and robust speech, but he should know that, by its very nature, the work of BTG is already commercial. It is already a commercial, profit-making enterprise, and it therefore sits uneasily and unnaturally within the statutory framework. The case for privatisation is as simple as that.

The hon. and learned Gentleman said that he generally favours privatisations, but the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was less sure. The case is simple—BTG is a profit-making, commercial operation, and there is simply no reason why it should not be privatised.

BTG's operating profits have averaged more than £4 million a year, rising to £6·8 million in 1989-90. It has been self-financing for more than 20 years and it is involved in 1,600 inventions, 8,500 patents and nearly 500 licences. BTG is a strong, indeed an obvious, candidate for privatisation. It is not surprising that the management of BTG has been pressing for privatisation for some time.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) asked a question of my hon. Friend the Minister which my hon. Friend was unable to answer at the time. It related to an alleged publicity campaign concerned with privatisation. It is not surprising that my hon. Friend could not reply. First, BTG has its own public relations budget and Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry are not consulted; secondly, it is merely a proposal from a public relations company to BTG and BTG has not yet adopted the campaign. So how my hon. Friend the Minister of State could be expected to know about it, I do not know. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East made great play of that. What I have said is surely the end of it.

I can tell the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) that management look forward to being freed from restrictions on its borrowing powers and obligations to submit approvals to the DTI. Also relevant is the inappropriateness of the domestic statutory duties laid on BTG decades ago and the direction which BTG wants to take on the international stage. Already BTG derives some 70 per cent. of its licence income from outside the United Kingdom, mainly from Japan, the United States and the European Community.

I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State back to the Chamber. He has just arrived back from India, where he was opening the largest ever trade fair there. BTG was exhibiting at that fair. No doubt the whole House was unimpressed by the carping remarks by some Opposition Members about my right hon. Friend.

Points about BTG's international involvement were made forcefully by my hon. Friends the Members for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) and for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North made a very pertinent point about BTG being unable to exploit a patent in Turkey.

Sir Colin Barker, BTG's chairman, heads a successful international profit-making organisation. He looks forward to BTG entering private life as an independent and integral organisation. I assure my hon. Friends the Members for Bedfordshire, North and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) that we believe that our objective of privatising so as to maximise the net returns to the Exchequer, consistent with a good prospect of BTG's technology transfer activities continuing, is the correct way forward.

That objective provides the flexibility to accommodate the privatisation options of public flotation, private placing, trade sale, or management buy-out, and the involvement of any parties with potential interests, such as companies, universities, institutions and BTG's staff. It recognises the reality that the future of a privatised BTG must essentially be a matter for its new owner, management and staff.

I was delighted to read the comments of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy in *The Independent* yesterday that a group of British universities was interested in taking over BTG, backed by money from investment funds. How pragmatic of him to enhance and advance the case of capitalism so publicly.

Dr. Moonie *rose*——

Mr. Leigh: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to retract what was in *The Independent*, I shall give him the opportunity to do so.

Dr. Moonie: One possibility is that a group of universities, backed by money, might take it over. I do not at present have any knowledge of such a group. It would be wrong to leave the Minister with the impression that I do.

Mr. Leigh: Of course, it would be wrong for anyone to expect the Opposition spokesman to look at the matter with an open mind. One might think that there was nothing intrinsically wrong with the proposal that the hon. Gentleman was advocating in *The Independent*. Clearly, his knuckles have been rapped and he is beating a hasty retreat.

Privatisation of BTG would not in any way weaken the Government's policy on innovation. Although BTG makes a significant contribution to the United Kingdom's innovative performance, it has rightly not been given a special role in the Government's innovation policy support measures. For example, although BTG's prime focus is as an exploiter of the science base, it has no special role—I use those words carefully—in the LINK scheme for collaborative research between companies and higher education institutions. Nor has BTG any special role in my Department's support for technology transfer through regional technology centres and overseas missions. The absence of such a role for BTG is quite deliberate. I do not believe, and I am sure that the chairman of BTG would agree with me, that an organisation successfully operating within the commercial disciplines of BTG should also act as an instrument of Government support programmes.

The Opposition ask why there is a need to privatise BTG; cannot the same objective be achieved, they say, by removing the present statutory constraints? I am sure that, when hon. Members think carefully, they will agree that bodies in the public sector must have monitoring arrangements. Loosening constraints will not get around that requirement. It is not for Government to second-guess the commercial decisions of companies, which must subject themselves to the discipline of the marketplace.

The Opposition view is that these proposals are tantamount to tampering with BTG's business. They say that BTG fills a gap where the United Kingdom is weak —turning ideas into products. I stress that we are not tampering with BTG's business of turning ideas into marketable products. BTG's management believes that privatisation will afford it the opportunity to compete more effectively without bureaucratic constraints.

It has been suggested that privatisation will not bring new capital to BTG. I disagree. The United Kingdom has the advantage of being one of the largest and most sophisticated capital markets in the world. There has never been a problem in attracting capital for worthwhile investments.

It has also been suggested today that a privatised BTG would no longer be obliged to act in the public interest. Where the public interest coincides with commercial interest, there should be no problem. However, where the two diverge or are in conflict, it will be up to the management to act in the best commercial interests of the company.

It has been suggested that BTG's business is so inherently long-term and risky that it is impossible to pick winners, and that only a public sector organisation can carry out this function; but many private sector organisations look to the long term—for example, in the oil and pharmaceuticals industries, as my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley said—and any prospective purchaser of BTG will also be looking to the long term.

We have heard very little in the debate of the Labour party's plans for BTG. At the beginning of my few words, I said that we must set BTG in perspective, remembering that it spends about £11 million a year out of a total research effort of over £11 billion. From what we understand from its policy document, "Looking to the Future", it seems that the Labour party would give an enhanced role to BTG. That smacks of the old-fashioned dirigiste interventionist approach.

We did not hear from the hon. Member from Dunfermline, East one word about the old National Enterprise Board. The Bill abolishes the NEB. My hon. Friends may be surprised to learn that the NEB is still alive. It has been in long hibernation, no doubt awaiting the arrival of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East to awaken it. He will not. The Bill kills it off. The powers of the NEB which remain on the statute book are frightening. It can borrow up to £750 million, it can form companies, it can buy shares and it can make acquisitions—*[Interruption.]* How significant that the Opposition now laugh about the NEB; how significant that they are no longer prepared to defend it. It is not surprising, given its history. Have they forgotten Chrysler, with £160 million poured into that company only for it to go bust within a couple of years? Have they forgotten Nexos, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, which went into liquidation owing the taxpayer about £32 million? That is the history of the NEB.

The Opposition are not prepared to accept the resuscitation of the NEB, but they have various sons of NEB in view. They have the BTE, the NIB, the RDA and the LIC. These are only initials to my hon. Friends, but in the unlikely event of a Labour Government, the names would become all too familiar—a national investment bank and regional development associations. They are the same policies, repackaged and revamped. The Bill will abolish the NEB, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 198.

Division No. 63] **[7 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*

Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. David Davis.

NOES

Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John

Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

British Railways (No. 2) Bill

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

Question proposed, That the Bill be now considered. *—[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

7.13 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): It may be for the convenience of the House if I remind hon. Members that the Bill received an unopposed Second Reading— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Will those hon. Members who are having a meeting by the doors, please do so on the other side?

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I was reminding the House that the Bill received an unopposed Second Reading on 1 February 1990 and went to a Committee on Unopposed Bills on 2 May 1990. During its passage through that Committee, an amendment was made by the British Railways Board removing the works requirements at Bedford, and it is because of that amendment that this consideration stage is now taking place.

Several hon. Members put down blocking motions at various stages in the Bill's progress and I hope that we can now be satisfied that those hon. Members have had their problems dealt with. I refer particularly to my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) who was concerned about the coal trains to the Drax power station. Assurances have now been given to the Selby district council that such heavy coal trains will not normally be routed via Selby.

That conveniently brings me to the point that will perhaps be raised by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. He supports works 13 and 14 which affect his constituency.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) expressed concern about works 6 and 7, the siding at Deighton, the ICI works. As far as I am aware, no problems about that now remain.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), whose name appears on the Order Paper today, is concerned about a piece of land in his constituency that has been sold to the local authority and requires fencing, about which he has had discussions with the board. I hope that the matter can be resolved speedily. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that the board is anxious to reach a speedy conclusion, but, clearly, the local authority will have its part to play in that. It may be that the hon. Gentleman will catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and explain the matter further.

The Bill is one of a large number of British Rail Bills. On this occasion, the works outlined are broadly not contentious. It is part of the legislation that British Rail brings forward each year to modernise and improve services. It will play a significant part in removing freight from road to rail and in providing better access for commuters in the London area and in South Yorkshire.

The Bill must be seen in the context of the £3·5 billion which is due to be spent during the next three years, but it would be impossible to talk about British Rail at this time without mentioning the difficulties that some travellers have experienced. The snow has obviously caused problems not just for rail users, but for road users as well.

I am advised by the board that the Meteorological Office has informed it that there have been only four occasions in the past 30 years when there has been a fall of more than 6 in of dry powder snow of the type that we have experienced in the past week. In the 19 years between 1963 and 1982, there was effectively no snow at all. The board is shortly to send a team to Sweden to examine the operation of railways in extreme conditions, and it is hoped that, when its report is available, it will provide information that can be used in future.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Did the hon. Gentleman say that there has been no snow deeper than 6 in in the recent past? If so, will he delineate the geographical spread of that claim?

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: We are talking about the special type of snow—over 6 in of dry powder. The Meteorological Office has advised the board that only four times in the past 30 years has that snow fallen. I have no doubt that there is plenty of wet snow falling tonight outside the Palace, but the snow that caused the problems in the last week is comparatively rare. I know that the board has taken note of what the hon. Member has said.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Many commuters in my constituency, and I am sure those in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) will take the explanation that the snow is of a different type and one not normally seen in the constituency——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The terms of the Bill are quite wide, but not wide enough to allow descriptions of the snow that we have had of late.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I shall move on immediately and obey your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Some 340 units on Network SouthEast have been damaged in this bad weather, and 130 traction motors have been replaced in the past 24 hours, but, overall, 50 per cent. of Network SouthEast operated normally this morning. The new Networker train has sealed motors, which will not be subject to the problems that I have outlined. Many of the new trains introduced by the board in recent years have never operated in serious snow conditions. Therefore, the problems relating to door operation and electrical circuits have not been experienced before.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall try to stay in order. If the Bill helps, on those days when there is not a peculiar type of snow, to make services reliable, many of our constituents will be happy. The problem is that the excuse was used in the following days when there was no snow, and there were still no regular trains. I hope that the Bill will help.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: If weaknesses exist in the design or manufacture of the units that have caused trouble, it will be for the manufacturers to put them right. British Rail is ensuring that all the lessons that can be learned are learned so that, by next winter, these problems will be behind us. I do not want to delay the House, because the Bill started with an unopposed Second Reading and went to an Unopposed Bill Committee. The works in the Bill are a small but significant contribution to the revival of the railway system in Britain. I ask the House to approve the amendment made by the Committee and in due course to give the Bill its Third Reading.

7.22 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I support the Bill, because, for many years, there has been a problem in the small industrial town of Knottingley in my constituency. After the boundary commission report, Knottingley became part of my constituency. In the early days I found that it had a major problem. Some 120 coal trains went through the centre of the town, cutting it in half and travelling 5 m or 6 m from back doors.

The people in the town had complained about that problem for a long time. When a planning inquiry gave permission for the development of the Selby coalfield, people were dismayed to find that one of the conditions was that the coal must travel by rail. The most sensible thing would have been for British Rail and British Coal to get together to get the shortest route between the Selby coalfield and the Drax B power station, which was completed at about the same time. Given that, for 60 years, coal from Selby will travel to Drax B, the longer route through Knottingley will result in much greater expense. It would have been economically viable and attractive to both parties to have a shorter cross-country route.

I understand that there were problems and, as a result, coal travelling from Selby to Drax went through Knottingley. When I tell hon. Members that that was in addition to the 120 coal trains already going through the town, they will appreciate the problem. In many meetings, correspondence and other contacts with all the parties concerned, such as the West Yorkshire county council, the Central Electricity Generating Board and the Secretary of State, great sympathy was shown, because everybody could see the problem. Suggestions were made for either a direct route or a bypass through Knottingley.

Despite all the efforts, in an Adjournment debate that I had in 1984, the then Minister at the Department of Transport turned down the proposal for change because it would cost £4 million. Given the cost of the development of Selby coalfield and of building Drax, £4 million to solve the problem would have been but a drop in the ocean. Unfortunately, it was not to be and since then, apart from the 180 coal trains going 5 m or 6 m from back doors, 24 hours a day, there has also been the problem of the level crossings which are closed for 30 per cent. of the day. One can imagine the traffic problems that that causes.

My constituents are impatient about the delay in the Bill because the Bill will alleviate their problems. British Rail is not getting much praise today, but it has attempted to solve the problem. If the Bill is agreed to, and British Rail carries out the works 13, 13A, 14 and 14A, a substantial amount of the traffic will no longer go through the centre of Nottingley, and none will go through at night. I recognise that hon. Members have a right to block Bills for genuine reasons, but the House will appreciate why my constituents, who do not understand the workings of the House, cannot understand why Parliament has been blocking a Bill that would help them. I hope that the House will pass the Bill, because if it does, my constituents will be most grateful.

7.29 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) has presented the Bill with his customary skill, but this is a terrible night for British Rail to put forward any Bill. My hon. Friend reminded us of the problems that so many of my constituents have faced in recent days. Normally the service from so many parts of my constituency to the centre of London is, to put it mildly, bad, but in the past five days it has too often been non-existent. It would be difficult to exaggerate the rage which so many commuters in my constituency feel about the way in which British Rail has tried to cope.

I am especially interested in part IV of the Bill, which deals with land and the purchase of land, because one of the curious phenomena of British Rail planning in recent times has been to find that it is proposing to move much of the freight from the industrial heartland of the country to the channel tunnel via the congested rail lines of southern London.

Many of my constituents have found that their properties are severely blighted by British Rail's plans. They are hoping that British Rail will propose better schemes for compensation. However when I looked at the provisions in part IV of the Bill, which relate to the purchase of land, I found that, far from improving compensation in clauses 32 and 36, British Rail is proposing to restrict the amount of money that it will have to pay out in certain cases.

Clearly this will not be the last British Rail Bill to come before us. I hope that in future Bills there will be adequate compensation clauses, because part IV of this Bill is far too restrictive. I am sorry to see it in the Bill.

7.32 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of the motion that I have tabled opposing the Bill. I shall be brief, first, because the issues that I wish to raise can be dealt with briefly as they are simple matters, and secondly, because my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) has informed me that tonight is his 49th birthday and that he needs to join the various street parties that are taking place in his home town.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) spoke to me before the debate. I listened carefully to his speech today, and I also know that the Bill has the support of a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House. When my hon. Friend told me that he had been struggling for 12 years to get some of the measures in the Bill into legislation, I felt that I could not be the person to prevent his constituents from benefiting from the Bill. However, having said that, I am sure that my hon. Friends and Conservative Members will not mind waiting a few moments to hear about the problems that the constituents of Leicester, East have had with the British Railways Board. My objection to the Bill is that it gives specific powers and duties to the British Railways Board, which I do not believe it will carry out properly, simply because it has not carried them out properly as they affect the citizens of Leicester and especially of Leicester, East.

My concern is a strip of land at the back of houses on Woodgreen walk in the west Humberstone area of my constituency. Some time ago there were no houses on that piece of land, but, as the housing needs of the city of Leicester developed, it was decided to sell the estate, which became known as the Willow Park estate, to a firm of private developers, which established about 1,000 households there. It left the land abutting the railway line in the ownership of British Rail.

British Rail has specific duties and responsibilities set out in many statutes. One that I would bring to the attention of the House is section 68 of the Railways Clauses Consolidation Act 1845, which I understand has not been substantially amended. Those responsibilities and duties enable the board to protect the lives of those people who live in the vicinity of land that it owns. However British Rail has, in my view, wilfully and continually ignored its statutory responsibilities.

Before I was elected to this place, when I was the parliamentary candidate for Leicester, East and another stood in my place, I was contacted by residents of the Willow Park estate. In particular Margaret Taylor, who went onto become the lady mayoress of Leicester, Philip Currie and Peter Maxwell, who formed themselves into a local residents group. They were worried because, from the time that they had lived on Willow Park estate, British Rail had not only failed to maintain the land and clear it of the debris that people were dumping on it, but had also failed to ensure that fencing had been adequately repaired.

As a result, I started my correspondence with the chairman of the British Railways Board. As the House can see from the pile here, I have written many letters to the British Railways Board to try to resolve the matter. At that early stage, I wrote to the chairman and requested a meeting. Following my election as the Member of Parliament, I convened a meeting with local residents and wrote again to the British Railways Board.

I received replies from the board and from the local authority, Leicester city council, which showed that no one knew who owned that piece of land. Many months of procrastination followed. British Rail, the local authority and the previous developers denied ownership of the land. Eventually, with a great deal of effort and work, we discovered that British Rail owned the land, and I contacted the regional office in Birmingham. I told British Rail what I told officers I met recently—that in my view this piece of land was of no material value to British Rail. The answer to the problem of constant letters and telephone calls from the local Member of Parliament and the local authority and the answer to the problem of young children running on to the track—through holes in the fences which people had cut to enable them to get to work quicker across the track—was to hand over the land either to the local authority or to the local residents. It took many months to convince British Rail of the need for such a scheme.

Eventually, officers from Birmingham came to meet me and local residents at the Northfields neighbourhood centre, and agreed in principle to hand over the land. At that stage, being a large organisation, it wanted to maximise the value of the land and was talking in terms of selling it to local residents or to the local authority. I pointed out to British Rail that there was no point in doing so, because no one could develop the land and the local residents would be the only people to benefit from it. Therefore, British Rail agreed to a scheme that would enable local residents to take the piece of land abutting their gardens, leading directly up to the railway line. British Rail was proposing to give the land to local residents at the peppercorn price of £1 for each strip, which

I thought was reasonable, as did many residents. Many of them had said that that was all it was worth, as they were not proposing to develop it, and the land was of no value to the local authority or to British Rail.

Then the problems arose. British Rail said that the residents would have to pay the cost of conveyancing—although a large legal services agency supports British Rail, and although British Rail pays a considerable amount to private solicitors to enable it to promote Bills of this nature. I put the residents in touch with a local solicitor.

The costs, it appeared, would amount to £100 per resident; in addition, the residents would have to pay a land registry fee of £30 and a fee for the incorporation of their residents' association. British Rail was not prepared to deal with each owner individually, preferring to deal with a single organisation: that meant another £30.

Next came the problem of who was to pay the cost of maintaining the land and repairing the fences before the land was handed over. British Rail estimated the cost at £10,000. Initially—in all generosity—it was prepared to contribute £2,500, 25 per cent. of the cost of the works. That was despite the fact that British Rail owned the land and was statutorily responsible for the maintenance and repair of the fences.

British Rail then looked to Leicester city council and the residents to make up the £7,500 difference. In good faith, I approached the council and wrote to the director of property services, Terry Ward. I asked him whether the council was prepared to provide £7,500 to repair the land and do British Rail's job for it. The reply stated—rightly, in my view—that it was the board's responsibility and that the council would make no contribution to the cost of the maintenance of the land and the repair of the fences. I was not at all surprised.

I then wrote again to Sir Robert Reid, the chairman of the board, suggesting that the stance adopted by him and his officials was not reasonable—mainly because they were responsible for the work. In March 1990, a meeting was convened at Leicester station, where I met regional officers, the station master and others to try to resolve the problem. During the negotiations, British Rail raised the amount that it was prepared to spend from £2,500 to £5,000: during a half-hour meeting, it was able to find an extra £2,500. At that stage, however, it still refused adamantly to pay the £5,000 that was needed to put the land into a decent state before it was handed over to the residents.

Surely it is reasonable for local residents to expect British Rail and its board to fulfil their statutory responsibilities: if they own land and fences, surely they should ensure that the fences are in a state of repair and the land is cleared of debris. I say that because the land now represents a hazard.

For the past decade, in the summer, people have dumped debris that they do not particularly want to keep in their homes—newspapers, for instance; and, when I went to have a look, a fridge had been dumped there. Anything that people do not want to drop at the council dump, or that council refuse collectors will not take, is dumped at the back of Woodgreen walk.

As can be imagined—even in the weather that we are now experiencing—the area becomes very hot in the summer as a result of the dumping, and there is always the risk of a fire. It is impossible for the emergency services to reach the site, because it is blocked with debris that has accumulated for a decade. Moreover, the fence puts local people at risk because there are holes in it: children, especially, can get onto the tracks and could be injured. When I visited the site with a British Rail official, a group of children were playing near the line, having got through the fence.

This represents an important test case, not only for the residents of Woodgreen walk but for residents of all homes that abut railway lines. As a legislator, I am not prepared to come here and vote through British Rail's legislation on the nod, when it has been seen to be completely incapable of fulfilling its proper responsibilities to the people of Woodgreen walk and the people of Leicester.

Everyone suddenly took a great interest in my problem when my name appeared above the motion asking for the Bill to be considered in six months' time—along with the names of the former leader of the Liberal party and others; they disappeared because they had other engagements, but courteously warned me that they could not be present. I was approached not only by Conservative Members, but by a Gentleman called Rufus. He seems to be some kind of liaison officer for the British Railways Board. He is a very courteous person; he wrote to me, but forgot to include my name in the letter. Clearly he has the letter on a word processor: whenever anyone tables a motion criticising British Rail, out pops the letter and Rufus signs it, forgetting to say who it is addressed to. There is no "Dear Mr. Vaz" or "Dear Sir"; it is a general letter saying, "I understand that you have put your name down to the motion. I should be very keen to discuss the matter with you."

I am sure that the board would be keen to discuss the matter with me—but why now? Why do legislators have to go to such extremes to protect their constituents? Why cannot British Rail come to Members of Parliament who have constituency problems and try to sort those problems out, without our having to delay the House by raising these matters?

British Rail has laid down a deadline—31 March 1991—for the completion of the process. It expects the residents to pay up to £300 to acquire a tiny strip of land at the end of their gardens, simply because it will not fulfil its statutory responsibilities.

I believe, in all honesty, that the way out of the problem—and the way in which to stop legislators having to take action of this kind—is for British Rail to come up with the additional money that is necessary for it to fulfil its obligations. If it did that and made a contribution to my constituents' legal costs—so that they would not have to pay up to £130 to take over something with which British Rail should be dealing—I should be satisfied, and I think that they would be as well.

If, however, British Rail fails to fulfil its statutory responsibilities, I will use every parliamentary device to ensure it does so and to bring to the House's attention when it seeks to pass such legislation that British Rail should be given no more powers until it is seen to be dealing with its responsibilities to the satisfaction of local people who pay such people as Rufus and the chairman of British Rail for the work they do.

7.48 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): In general terms, I welcome the Bill. I should declare an interest: I have five £10 shares in the Keighley and Worth Valley light railway.

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

I was the founder of the Keighley and Worth Valley railway preservation society; I called the first meeting, and was chairman for 10 years. As the House will be only too keenly aware, no dividend has ever been paid on the shares, because the money goes back into ensuring that the railway provides one of the best preserved steam-operated services in the country. I thought that I should mention that to show that I have some experience of the operation of railways, having done most of the jobs connected with the operation of the five-mile branch line.

Clause 7 relates to a viaduct that formerly carried the Kirkburton branch railway over the Huddersfield broad canal. After a number of works have been carried out, the board will be relieved of the obligation to maintain the viaduct for the purposes of the 1863 Act. Does that mean that the board will be entitled to demolish the viaduct? Insufficient viaducts are carrying railways, their primary and true purpose. However, they form an important part of our landscape. That is recognised by the British Railways Board; its viaducts committee examines the merits of viaducts. The board accepts the onerous obligation of maintaining a limited number of viaducts in such a condition that they remain part of the landscape, even though they do not carry traffic. However, it seeks to discard others. Few commercial organisations retain discarded items of equipment, purely because they are liked by members of the public. I wonder, therefore, whether this viaduct is worthy of preservation, or whether the board intends to demolish it.

There is a fair amount of interest in these often magnificent structures. Their construction sometimes involved loss of life. They provide a reminder of what the former Prime Minister regarded as Victorian values. I am sure, therefore, that all those who sit on the Treasury Bench will want not Victorian values but Victorian monuments to be retained wherever possible. Clause 14 provides that the board shall install a new level crossing in the borough of Northampton. The board normally tries to avoid creating new level crossings. They impede traffic and are a nuisance both to the board and to traffic users. The board has to bear the maintenance costs. If, however, it believes that there should be a level crossing, one accepts its judgment.

According to subsection 3:

"The Board may, subject to such requirements as the Secretary of State may from time to time lay down, provide, maintain and operate at or near the new level crossing such barriers, lights, traffic signs and automatic or other devices and appliances as may be approved by the Secretary of State."

There is no better form of supervision at level crossings than people. A number of accidents has resulted from the use of flashing lights. An infamous accident occurred at Hixon level crossing. A driver was transporting a transformer across a level crossing. Due to a hump on the level crossing, the transformer on the low loader ground to a halt. A locomotive train ran into the transformer, fortunately without doing much injury and there was no loss of life. If, however, that level crossing had been staffed, the accident would not have occurred.

On such minor railways as the Keighley and Worth Valley railway, level crossing gates, due to the light railway legislation, are linked to signals. That is not a requirement of the operating regulations laid down by the Department of Transport for such level crossings as that referred to in clause 14(3). That is why I imagine the subsection is couched in such general terms. The Minister is no doubt listening attentively while reading a guide to the House of Commons.

The Department should reconsider that question. It is neither sensible nor safe to continue to say to British Rail, "Get rid of employees." That is what the Government have said, in a number of guises, to British Rail. Danger results from the removal of human supervision at level crossings. If there is no link between gate closures and signals, a hazard may result. That point should be borne in mind.

During this difficult weather there have been a number of train delays because of frozen sliding electrical doors. Trains of that design were introduced so that trains can be operated by one man. If the doors are electrically operated, no platform staff are required to make sure that they are closed before a train leaves the station. Manually operated doors are simpler and safer and can be operated simply and reliably in freezing weather. However, the Government have put pressure on British Rail to cut costs —mostly employees. Consequently, during inclement weather British Rail has great difficulty maintaining services.

The Bill is couched in wide terms. There have been a number of accidents at unmanned level crossings. I suspect that they are different from the kind of level crossing envisaged in clause 14(3). However, I hope that the promoter of the Bill will clarify the position. Unmanned level crossings have led to people going on to them and being involved in accidents. There is a telephone link to the nearest signal box, which may be some distance away. Telephone boxes have sometimes been vandalised. It is outrageous and wicked for anyone to vandalise such equipment and place people's lives in jeopardy.

Towards the end of 1990, there was a level crossing accident near Doncaster. The accident was not due to a vandalised telephone. A young woman and at least two children were, tragically, killed. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) has drawn my attention to an accident at Harrison Farm level crossing. A seven-year-old girl was knocked down and killed by a train on the main Newcastle-to-Sunderland railway line. The view of the people who live there and of the deeply saddened relatives is that either the crossing should be closed or that it should be staffed by someone. If a level crossing is much used, someone should be there.

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The hon. Gentleman said that the Doncaster accident happened on a level crossing. I should put on record the fact that it is a public right of way—a footpath. I am sure that he will accept that it is not a level crossing. I cannot comment on the case in the constituency of the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon).

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to the Minister. Of course, a level crossing is just what the term implies. A device is fixed across the line to give people a level walk over the rails. I accept the Minister's differentiation—that this was a foot crossing, rather than a vehicle crossing—but the principle is the same.

The Minister may be interested to know that the Secretary of State will have received a letter about the sad accident at Harrison Farm crossing. I hope that the point I am making can be put clearly to British Rail. Where the

board is given powers to operate a crossing—as in clause 14(3)—the Government should give sympathetic consideration to the provision of staffed level crossings if there is the slightest danger of a reduction in safety arising from having flashing lights and barriers with no linkage between the level crossing gates and the signals.

Let me remind the Minister of the procedure that used to apply to all level crossings throughout the country. A key that was fastened to the gate had to slide into a lock when the gate was in the closed position across the railway, physically preventing access to the railway. In fact, there were two keys at each crossing—one at either gate. Both had to be inserted and turned before the home signal protecting the level crossing against railway traffic could be released and railway traffic could proceed past the level crossing. That was a pretty foolproof system.

There is no doubt that rail speeds are higher than they used to be. Electric trains and high-speed diesel electric trains run at higher average speeds than were prevalent in the days of steam operation. In addition, they do not produce as much noise as did steam-generated locomotives. Of course, that noise was a source of very great affection to many people. The exhaust beat from a three-cylinder Gresley Pacific locomotive—an A4 "Streak"—was music to many people's ears. But it was also a warning to people using level crossings. Modern trains are faster and more silent than their predecessors. I urge the Minister to convey to the Secretary of State and to the other Ministers in his Department that there is a very good case for ensuring the highest possible safety standards at level crossings. If that means providing British Rail with extra money to employ people, it will be money well spent.

I hope that this Bill will pass. It should result in the provision of extra facilities for British Rail. It authorises several additional works. I hope that it will facilitate a shift of traffic from roads to railways—something that all hon. Members, certainly those on the Opposition Benches, wish to see. Railways are inherently safer than roads. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) made a specific point about railways being intrusive. By and large, railways are less intrusive than roads. Freight trains are less intrusive than the juggernauts that pass houses at close quarters 24 hours a day. I accept that my hon. Friend has a perfectly valid case, but that case has been met by British Rail. We want to ensure success for British Rail.

Mr. Lofthouse: I point out that the whole case has not been met, although a substantial part of it has. I should not like it to be thought that the entire problem has been solved.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's indication that the Bill goes some way towards solving the problem. It is a step in the right direction.

I hope that the Bill will turn out to be a tiny step in the direction of the regeneration of British Rail. It is the annual "odds and sods" Bill—the garnering together of all the bits and pieces of legislative authority that are needed. Let us hope that British Rail, by using that authority, will generate increased traffic and reduce the burden on our roads.

8.5 pm

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): It may be helpful if I intervene briefly to give the Government's view on this Bill. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was rather dismissive of my reading Dod's. In fact, I was reading for further background information. I was very interested to see that the hon. Gentleman has written two volumes on railways—one in 1969 and one in 1972. That may have been some time before he entered this House. Perhaps he would use his time well by providing us with volume 3 and perhaps even volume 4.

The Government have considered the contents of the Bill and have no objections in principle to the powers sought by the British Railways Board. So far as the Department is concerned, there are no points outstanding. It is for the promoters to persuade Parliament that the powers they seek are justified. There were two petitioners against the Bill, but those petitions have now been withdrawn. The Unopposed Bills Committee has allowed the Bill to proceed with amendments. Judging by the debate so far, I think that there is agreement to it on both sides of the Chamber.

8.7 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): You will be relieved, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I do not intend to refer to the copious reference books in front of me. A glance at them makes me grateful that I did not have to be present for the winding-up speech in the last debate. Obviously, it was extremely complex.

As the Minister has said, general powers Bills are regular occurrences in this House. Such legislation provides British Rail with a valuable opportunity to make minor improvements up and down the country. I refer in particular to works No. 6 and No. 7. All of us who take an interest in these matters will be pleased to see a switch of freight from road to rail. All too often these days, the reverse happens.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) on being able to get some way along the route of diverting trains away from his constituency. This is something for which he has campaigned for a considerable time. I hope that his partial success will be followed by complete success in the years to come.

I was interested in the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). I am grateful to him for his birthday wishes. I know that this has not yet happened to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but when one reaches one's 49th birthday, one appreciates it if people do not remind others of the event.

My hon. Friend made a very wide-ranging case. His was a splendid piece of advocacy. If I followed the gist of his comments, the projects about which he complained are not covered by this Bill. However, I understand that, under our procedures, he was quite entitled to raise them. He seems to be of the opinion that British Rail should not only sell land at a nominal price but also tidy it up, fence it, and pay the legal costs of his constituents. As I have said, it was a splendid piece of advocacy.

Some of us think that, if British Rail were to be so generous, it might find the money to run the trains in accordance with the timetables. I am thinking in particular of services between Birmingham and London over the past

[Mr. Peter Snape]

few weeks. My hon. Friend's splendid advocacy will have been heard, and perhaps it will be acted upon by those who are in a position to make such decisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred to the viaduct involved in works No. 6 and No. 7 and to level crossings. I hope that he will agree that British Rail has an onerous burden in maintaining many of these facilities, especially those on railway lines that are no longer being used, or are sparsely used. The Government and the Department must consider how best this financial burden might be lifted from the shoulders of British Rail, so that it might be able to do what, at least in theory, it is supposed to do—run passenger services in accordance with timetables.

The House will be grateful to the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir P. NcNair-Wilson) for presenting the Bill in his usual able manner. He spoke about the difficulties that British Rail—particularly Network SouthEast—is suffering now. All too often in debates about railway matters, we end up with anecdotes being swapped from one side of the House to the other, and we do not get very far that way. There is something wrong with a system under which, four days after a major fall of snow, Network SouthEast can still run only 50 per cent. of its booked trains. At the risk of delving into my anecdotal memories, 34 years ago when I first started to work for British Rail—a railway of steam locomotives and paraffin lamps in the signals—passenger train cancellations were virtually unheard of. In the modern and updated system that we have now, they are a daily occurrence in virtually every part of the country.

The hon. Member for New Forest told us, eloquently if not convincingly, that 334 units are out of service because of the type and quality of the snow that fell last week. That is difficult to believe. We need a Government concerned to provide a proper railway service rather than to cut year after year the money available to operate it. We need a management capable of running trains rather than budgets. Managerial prospects now appear to depend exclusively on remaining within a budget laid down by someone else and not on providing satisfaction to the passengers, or customers, or whatever they like to call us poor unfortunates who wait for a considerable time for a train that does not arrive, even when it is shown on a timetable. All too often the timetables appear to be a figment of someone's imagination.

The Labour party officially welcomes the proposals in the general powers Bill. We welcome anything that helps the railway industry. I hope that the hon. Member for New Forest will be back, perhaps later this year, with the British Rail (No. 3) Bill, bringing forward all the necessary improvements that, for various reasons, have not made it into this Bill.

8.12 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: With the leave of the House, I should like to refer to some of the points that have been made. I thank the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) for his support on this occasion, as on others. I know that he has the railway system very much at heart. I congratulate him and wish him many happy returns of the day.

I thank the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) for the warm welcome that he gave to the works about which he spoke so eloquently. I hope that they will provide the relief for his constituents that I know he has been seeking for so long.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodheart) dealt with the problems of commuters. My hon. Friend will recall that I previously had the honour to be the Member for Lewisham, West, which shares the same railway system as his constituents have to use. I can assure him that British Rail is as unhappy as his constituents are about the difficulties that have been forced upon it during the past week. As I said earlier, a team is going to Sweden to look at harsh weather performance and other matters to ensure that, in future winters, we do not have the same problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham referred to part IV of the Bill, dealing with the purchase of land, and talked about the channel tunnel. He will know that no route has yet been agreed. That may be causing all the problems of blight in the south of London to which he referred. The terms and conditions set out in part IV relate to the works in this Bill. I can assure him that, were we to move to the stage to which he referred—the channel tunnel link in any form—clearly we would be looking at separate terms and conditions of purchase.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who is not in his place at the moment, spoke eloquently about the problems of his constituents. He will realise that British Rail will stand by the assurance I gave earlier in the debate. I hope that the matters to which he referred can be resolved speedily.

As has already been pointed out, the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is an acknowledged expert on the railway system. He referred to clauses 7 and 14. On clause 7, the intention is to use the viaduct because it is related to the Deighton siding to which I referred earlier. On clause 14, the hon. Gentleman will know with his experience of these Bills, that, as is pointed out in subsection 3, safety is a matter for the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has to give his approval for the board to provide, maintain and operate barriers, lights, signs and other devices and appliances. Clearly, the board wants to be free to introduce the latest technology as and when it is available. However, ultimately it is for the Secretary of State to determine that those matters lead to greater safety. I agree entirely with what he said about safety, and I can assure him—I am sure that he knows already—that, for the board, safety is the absolute No. 1 priority.

This has been a useful debate. The Bill started modestly enough, with an unopposed Second Reading, and I hope that, having dealt, I hope satisfactorily, with some of the points that have been made, and judging from the general support that the Bill appears to enjoy in the House, it can now proceed to a Third Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill, as amended, considered accordingly; to be read the Third time.

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY (No. 2) BILL

(By Order.)

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.—*[Mr. Neil Thorne.]*

Question put and agreed to.

Bill referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

British Technology Group Bill *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—
Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the British Technology Group Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any expenses incurred by the Treasury or the Secretary of State in acquiring securities of the successor company (within the meaning of that Act) or rights to subscribe for any such securities; and

(ii) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State or the Treasury in consequence of the provisions of that Act;

(b) the payment out of the National Loans Fund of any sums required by the Secretary of State for making loans to the successor company;

(c) payments into the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

8.17 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): There has been a gap between the Second Reading debate and this money resolution. Before the Minister mentions my absence from the Chamber during the Second Reading debate, I should tell him that I was chairing the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. It is not a glamorous job, but it has to be done, and it takes me out of the Chamber for a couple of hours every Tuesday afternoon from 4.30 pm. Therefore, I apologise for not being here during the bulk of the debate, but, as the Minister knows, I was here for the Front-Bench replies, so I am familiar with the arguments used.

The money resolution provides, in the usual form, for covering expenses—one cannot cavil at that. It relates to administrative expenses in addition to expenses involved in acquiring securities of the successor company. However, the second part of the resolution causes me some concern, because it authorises

"the payment out of the National Loans Fund of any sums required by the Secretary of State for making loans to the successor company".

The successor company is the replacement for the British Technology Group. When the Minister spoke, he had that fanatical gleam that comes to the eyes of any Members of the no-turning-back or goose-stepping tendency in the Conservative party. We have seen on previous privatisation occasions how the rules of probity and good sense that normally govern the operation of our government are cast to the wind.

I want to suggest to the Minister a possible scenario. Let us consider a contributor to the Conservative party, such as Lord Hanson, who at one time was put forward to buy at least one of the generating companies that are now being offered to the public. It was hoped that he would get the Government off the hook in that area of privatisation. Let us suppose that a Tory party sympathiser comes along and says, "I am very willing to take up the purchase of the British Technology Group." Arrangements are then made to privatise it, and the most influential purchaser of shares in the company is Lord Hanson. What is to stop the Minister expressing his appreciation of that by making loans to the company? He could not do that when it was not a Crown company, but there is a time before full privatisation when the Secretary of State has control of the company and can make loans under clause 8(3). He can lay down conditions and require that the loan

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

"shall be repaid to him as such time and by such methods, and interest on it shall be paid to him as such rate and at such time, as he may, with the consent of the Treasury, from time to time direct."

That is a pretty wide power to give the Secretary of State, and it is included in the primary legislation. I am not talking about his producing any delegated powers of any rules subject to approval by the House.

All that is saving us from handing over loans at preferential rates of interest to a company that it is arranged is about to be bought by an influential figure in the City scene—or whomever it may be—is the consent of the Treasury. It is rather alarming that, in the money resolution, we are handing over such powers in a process that I regard as wholly lamentable and which is in the hands of Ministers who are deeply committed not only to privatisation, but to privatisation on the basis that the process will not be subject to the criticism of hon. Members. Those Ministers need to make the process as successful as they can.

One of the ways in which Ministers can make the transfer successful is to ensure that the company is given all the loan money that it needs from the public purse. This will not be the first time that that has happened. Rover was an example of a privatisation in which a firm with assets of more than £750 million was handed over to British Aerospace at a cost of about £150 million. Lord Young, who was then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, was criticised by the European Commission for the sweeteners that he allowed to be given to British Aerospace and which were not revealed to the public at large in the privatisation. This is a matter of considerable alarm.

My hon. Friend will recall that Lord Macmillan talked about selling off the family silver. We are now getting on to the peripheral pieces of family silver about which most people do not know. We are going into the attic. However, in this attic there is a highly successful group, as has been acknowledged by everyone. All the privatisation proposals have involved organisations that have been widely praised by the Government for the devotion and determination of the workers involved. Yet the Government thrust them out into what is euphemistically termed the "marketplace".

We know that the marketplace is not the never-never land that is so loved by the Minister. We know that it involves deals and arrangements between people who are in influential positions because they have a lot of money. If the Government seek to make this privatisation successful, they will want to make substantial loans. The money resolution and the components of the Bill provide that power. There are few safeguards in the Bill or in the money resolution to restrict what the Government can do.

It is alarming that the Minister, who has a reputation for extreme right-wing zeal, and the Secretary of State, who is part of the No Turning Back group and who is another little zealot in the Government machine, are ready to hand over large sums of taxpayers' money. What will happen? We shall be too late. The money resolution and the primary legislation will have been passed. The whole thing is to be handed over with a veneer of legality.

However, we know that the process is designed to ensure not the reasonable loans that are needed but large sums to be handed over to a privatised company. The Government will then proclaim, "This is a success of privatisation." We know that it is a public success in every sense. The Government take a public organisation that has been successful and they then take public funds to provide further loans from the national loans fund to guarantee some sort of success.

I raise those points in perturbation. I tend to examine money resolutions. It is not a convention to vote on those resolutions, although I think that it should be. I should like to vote on them more often, because the money is the key to the whole business. We have passed the primary legislation which authorises the Government to provide money. The money resolution is a specific control by Parliament so that we can say to Ministers, "You have got the power to do this." I should like to withhold that power. I wait with eagerness to see whether the Minister, with the zealot's gleam in his eye, provides a satisfactory explanation or whether he simply provides the defensive briefing on money resolutions with which, I am delighted to say, most Ministers are now provided because money resolutions tend to be debated more frequently these days. I look forward to the Minister's comments.

8.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): We always enjoy the contributions of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) on money resolutions. It is true that I have come prepared for the comments that I thought that the hon. Gentleman might make. He had some fun, but I will not follow him down that road.

The essence of the hon. Gentleman's remarks was a technical point concerned with the national loans fund and with lending to the successor company under clause 8. If I understood the gist of what the hon. Gentleman said, he seemed to suggest that the money might be misused.

Mr. Cryer: Making excessive loans.

Mr. Leigh: I think that I can give him the reassurance that he needs about excessive loans. The Secretary of State is empowered only to lend money to the successor company from the national loans fund while it remains wholly Government owned. That is merely a contingency measure in case privatisation is delayed. I hope that I can also reassure the hon. Gentleman by saying that it will be a condition of any such loans that they are repaid in full before privatisation. I think that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point.

Question put and agreed to.

Namibia Bill *[Lords]*

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

8.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Before I give my support to the Bill on Third Reading, let me ask the Minister one or two questions following our Second Reading debate last week.

In her reply to that debate, the Minister for Overseas Development talked about Walvis bay. Do the Government envisage the "early" reintegration of Walvis bay into Namibia taking place before the end of this year? Will Namibia's 12 offshore islands be included, and what sort of encouragement—the Minister's word—will the Government bring to bear on South Africa to relinquish its invalid territorial claim to Walvis bay?

What did the Minister for Overseas Development mean when she said that the Government would help the Namibian Government to tackle the problem of inherited debt, estimated at 800 million rand, which South Africa illegally imposed on the country before independence? Surely in international law the debt belongs to the South African reserve bank which, in turn, owes Namibia a large sum of accumulated foreign currency. Will the Minister support in principle the renunciation of the entire illegal debt?

We appreciate that development projects in education, agriculture and fisheries take time to plan, but does the Minister agree that the Government have been a bit slow off the mark—especially in agriculture and fisheries, given that other countries are already helping to drill bore holes, dig wells, train coastguards, provide seed and research fish stocks?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Lady, but we had a fairly wide-ranging debate on Second Reading, and we are now on Third Reading. Hon. Members must direct their remarks to what is in the Bill. I am finding it slightly difficult to understand how the hon. Lady's present remarks can be related to what is in the Bill.

Mrs. Clwyd: I appreciate that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am bringing my remarks to a close.

Namibia is now a Commonwealth country and the Bill reinforces its status as such. The present situation is an example of what could happen elsewhere in southern Africa. Will the Minister therefore explain why, over the next three years, the Government are to provide only about a quarter of the bilateral aid that is to be provided by Sweden, and far less than many other countries are providing?

Given that the most organised part of the Government's aid to Namibia so far is in military and police training, it is not good enough to say that all police forces should operate on the basis of full respect for human rights and the law. Hon. Members asked last week for the assurance that training will have a specific human rights component. Will the Minister now assure us that that will be the case?

I have several other questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I will not strain your considerable patience tonight, as we had a full debate last week. Nevertheless, I should be grateful if the Minister would respond more fully to my questions when he has an opportunity.

8.34 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the occupants of the Treasury Bench, to the House and to the Government and people of Namibia for not having attended the whole of the Second Reading debate last week. I was present for most of the winding-up speeches, but unfortunately until then was engaged on other commitments elsewhere in the House.

I warmly welcome the Bill. Some hon. Members will know that for almost all my 20 years in the House, I have taken a great interest in Namibia, which is a wonderful country. I do not hesitate to say that, if I was not a citizen of the United Kingdom, there is no other country in which I should like to live more than in Namibia—or South-West Africa, as it was known.

I have had the privilege of visiting that country on many occasions. I must say that the new Government of Namibia would not have been the Government of my choosing. I would much have preferred it had the Democratic Turnhaller Alliance won the election, but SWAPO and its allies won it fairly and squarely and I believe that they stand a chance of forging a multi-party democracy in that country which will stand the rest of Africa in good stead for the future. All of us watch Namibia with great interest.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) referred to the debt that the new Government inevitably inherited from the Administration that preceded them. I hope that the United Kingdom Government, the EC and other countries will seek to ensure that the fragile body of democracy which is Namibia will not have a millstone round its neck in the form of the large debt that it inherited. I repeat that I have visited Namibia many times; I have been to north, south, east and west. The infrastructure that has been built up is amazing. It is probably one of the best in the African continent. To that extent, the new Administration, under President Nujoma, have a good legacy on which to build for the future. But we do not want them to be handicapped and restricted by the heavy debt incurred by the previous Administration and so prevented from doing what is necessary to ensure their country's prosperity.

I go a little wide, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Bill has gone through the House extremely quickly. I do not believe that the admission of a new country to the British Commonwealth should go through on the nod, without those who have some knowledge of that country contributing to the debate and wishing it well. I hope that Namibia's immense potential can be used by its people.

Many hon. Members will know that the country comprises at least 11 different tribal groups, speaking 16 or more different languages. The Namibians have immense problems with education and the provision of educational equipment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Chairman's Panel, to help me. I have already called the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) to order. The occupant of the Chair

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

allowed a long debate on Second Reading. We are now on Third Reading and we must discuss what is in the Bill. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will now do just that.

Mr. Winterton: Indeed I will. You have brought me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall certainly accede to your instruction.

I hope that Britain, as one of the leading countries of what was the British Commonwealth and is now simply the Commonwealth, will seek to play its part in ensuring the success of this fledgling country. Namibia has only 1·4 million people, but, as a member of the Commonwealth, it can take advantage of the immense wealth of good will and experience that is comprised in and can be obtained from the Commonwealth. I wish Namibia well. I wish its Government and its Opposition parties well. I hope that the country can set the example for the rest of Africa. I know that President de Klerk is doing his best in the Republic, but if there is success in African democracy—for that is what is important—there can be peace in that continent and Namibia can set the pace of reform and progress in the whole of southern Africa.

8.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): This is a technical Bill to amend United Kingdom law to take account of Namibia's independence and membership of the Commonwealth. There have been debates both in this House and another place, not on the provisions of the Bill, which are largely uncontentious, but on the policy towards the newly independent Government of Namibia. Members of both Houses have had ample opportunity to express their opinions and I am happy to say that the debates have shown universal good will towards Namibia, a good will which was reiterated tonight by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) asked several questions, to which I shall reply briefly. If any elaboration is needed, I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will communicate with the hon. Lady.

As we have already said, we support the early integration of Walvis bay. In this context, "early" means as soon as practicable. It is for the Governments of South Africa and Namibia to determine the pace of negotiations. It is equally for them to determine the scope of any agreement and whether, for example, it would include the offshore islands presently administered with Walvis bay. As for encouragement, we have already emphasised in talks with the South Africans the importance of the talks to Namibia's prosperity. We believe that they will recognise the importance to the region and to themselves of an economically healthy Namibia and the key role of access to Walvis bay facilities.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley also mentioned the inherited debt, which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development made it clear that Namibia is already providing in its 1990 budget for servicing and repayment of that debt. Namibia has not sought renunciation of the entire legal debt.

The hon. Lady asked several questions about aid. If I may, I shall draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development. I know that she will read the *Hansard* report of the debate. I shall ask her to provide the hon. Lady with answers in writing. Let us all hope that the immense potential of Namibia will be realised, to use the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield. On that note, I am happy to commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

OVERSEA SUPERANNUATION BILL [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Oversea Superannuation Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) that payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of any provision of the Act or of any scheme made or having effect as if made under section 2 of the Overseas Pensions Act 1973 by virtue of the Act;

(ii) any administrative expenses incurred by a Government department in consequence of the Act;

(iii) any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act;

(b) the making of payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Lighthouse Authorities

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft General Lighthouse Authorities (Beacons: Hyperbolic Systems) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 20th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Unfair Dismissal (Compensation)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Compensation Limit) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Unfair Dismissal (Awards)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Limits of Basic and Special Awards) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Employment Protection

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

House of Commons (Services)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Graham Bright and Mr. David Lightbown be discharged from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) and Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Greg Knight be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I object to this item on the grounds that the Government have continually failed to set up a Select Committee to deal with Scottish affairs. Until they do, we shall continue to object to motions of this type.

Question put and agreed to.

The Gulf

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

8.45 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My good fortune to begin an Adjournment debate at a quarter to 9 on the role of the United Nations in relation to the Gulf is tinged with just a little sadness. It is sadness that the House of Commons has allowed time to pass from 21 January, when the important questions that I am about to ask should have been asked. In the House of Commons to which I was first elected and of which the father of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was a distinguished and powerful Member, those questions would have been asked not by a Back Bencher like me, but by Hugh Gaitskell from the Front Bench. These are major issues which belong to not an Adjournment debate but what should be a weekly major debate initiated by the Opposition party or the Government party in prime time.

Having said that, I should like to set some questions, talking quietly to the Minister, as we have the opportunity to do. The first is on the attitude to the United Nations of the Soviet Union. In his most recent statement, Mr. Gorbachev said:

"The events in the region of the Persian Gulf are assuming an increasingly alarming and dramatic turn. The fly-wheel"—

the fly-wheel—

"of one of the major wars of recent decades is spinning free. The number of casualties, including among the civilian population, is multiplying. The military activity has already caused enormous material damage. Whole countries—first Kuwait and now Iraq and later possibly others—are under the threat of catastrophic destruction. The discharge of a gigantic amount of oil into the Persian Gulf may turn into the gravest ecological disaster."

That is part of the latest Russian attitude.

The House will allow me one more quotation on the Russians. It comes from Mr. Brinkley's interview of Marshal Akhromeyev, the chief military adviser to President Gorbachev and the former Soviet chief of staff. Mr. Brinkley said:

"'Mr. Gorbachev has said recently, and again yesterday, that the alliance forces are in danger of exceeding the UN mandate, which is simply to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Is it your view, Marshall Akhromeyev, that by the tactics of comprehensive bombing in Iraq, the United States and its allies may be exceeding the UN mandate? And if so, what might the Soviet Union do about that?"

Marshal Akhromeyev replied:

"'You see, in life we sometimes come across such kind of situations. When a war has been started with just purposes, then it acquires a different kind of character."

I stress those words.

"Something of this kind is taking place in the Gulf area today. Who knows?'"

The Government asserted that the American and British force—for such in reality it ever was and has certainly now become—had Russian backing; does it still have Russian backing? What assessment have the Goverment made of the Soviet position? I hear from several sources—there is no reason to suppose that the reports are in any way exaggerated—that men are walking from Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan, Azarbaijan, Kazakhstan —Muslims from those southern Russian republics—to offer their services to Saddam Hussein. That is an ingredient of an extremely dangerous situation.

What is the Government's assessment of the Soviet attitude now that we are in week 4 of a military situation,

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

the nature of which, as in most wars, has changed from the start of that war? The events of 1915 were very different from those surrounding the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Wars take on a momentum of their own.

My second question, which is linked with the Russians, is about the Government's assessment of the bombing. My question is direct. Can the Minister point out to me whereabouts in the United Nations resolutions there is authority for the pounding of Baghdad night after night after night? There may be that authority, but I have not found it.

Bluntly, an increasing number of people, not only in Arabic and Islamic countries or in third-world countries, but in this country and thoughout the world, are embarrassed and unhappy—many are vomit-stricken—by what is happening. To think that those huge B52s leave that lovely Gloucestershire village of Fairford to go to drop their bombs—I do not know how accurately, except that Ramsey Clark makes it quite clear, as a former American Attorney-General, that the casualties are now mounting. Did the United Nations ever authorise that? Did it authorise the B52s?

What would the Minister or any of us here—my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Glasgow Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis)—do if we were subject to such bombing? If I had been bombed last year or in any year from 1979, I would have "got right behind Margaret Thatcher". It is human reaction to get behind the leader of the country when one is being attacked.

What is the Government's assessment of the reaction to the bombing of Baghdad? I suspect that the people of Baghdad are reacting in the same way as all human beings react, as Londoners in this city reacted in 1940 and as the people of Hamburg reacted in 1943. The people of that proud Hanseatic city did not like the Nazis or Hitler at all, but during the bombing they stepped up production. I cannot say that production is going up in Baghdad, but I suspect that that bombing makes people more determined, not less.

What is the Government's assessment of the effects of such bombing? Furthermore, what is the effect on the troops who are bombed? We may say that we are concentrating all our bombing on Kuwait, but are we sure that that does not make the troops more determined? I fear very much for a land battle, because that battle could be another Stalingrad. It could be a battle of hand-to-hand fighting, block by block. Are we sure that the United Nations authorises that?

I am aware that we have some time for this debate, but my speech will not be endless. I have a specific question about the attitude of the United Nations Secretary General. I drew to the attention of the Foreign Office a report by Leonard Doyle from New York that appeared in *The Independent* on Monday 11 February under the banner headline "UN 'has no role in running war'". Forgive me, but I thought that we were acting as the United Nations force. That is what I have been told endlessly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). However, that report states:

"The United Nations Security Council is not running the war in the Gulf"—

who said that?—

"according to Javier Perez de Cuellar, the Secretary-General."

It might be thought that he was in a position of some authority to pass comment on that.

Mr. Doyle reported that Mr. Perez de Cuellar

"told *The Independent* at the weekend that the council had handed control to the US, Britain and France and only learnt the outcome of military actions after they had taken place."

If it is a United Nations war, it is a bit odd that the Secretary-General learned about military actions only after they had taken place. The report continues:

"Distancing himself from allegations that the strategic objectives of the US and its allies go beyond the liberation of Kuwait, Mr. Perez de Cuellar said he could not say whether particular military actions, like the sustained and massive bombing of Iraq's infra-structure, were consistent with the United Nations resolutions."

We are entitled to ask, do the Government think that they are consistent with the United Nations resolutions? If the Secretary-General has doubts about it, the burden of proof is certainly on the Government to say how they think that the regular, nightly, massive unparalleled bombing, described by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) as 20 times nighly what Coventry received during the blitz, is consistent with UN resolutions.

The report goes on:

"But he"—

that is, Mr. Perez de Cuellar—

"did express his distress that the UN is now associated with loss of human life caused by the war. 'This war is not a classic United Nations war in the sense that there is no United Nations control of the operations, no United Nations flag, [blue] helmets, or any engagement of the military staff committee', he said.

'What we know about the war, which I prefer to call hostilities, is what we hear from the three members of the Security Council which are involved—Britain, France and the United States—which every two or three days report to the Council, after the actions have taken place.'"

This is different from Korea. I was not in Korea, but I did my national service at the time of Korea as tank crew in the Rhine Army. Many of those with whom I trained went to the King's Royal Irish Hussars and were shot up in Korea. I have a clear memory that it was all about the United Nations; it was certainly drummed into us that it was about the United Nations. The position in the Gulf in 1991 is different.

Mr. Doyle's report of Mr. Perez de Cuellar's comments continues:

"'The Council, which has authorised all this, [is informed] only after the military actions have taken place. As I am not a military expert I cannot evaluate how necessary are the military actions taking place now,' he added.

He was concerned most about the loss of human life, he said, 'because as Secretary-General of the United Nations I consider myself head of an organisation which is first of all a peaceful organisation and secondly a humanitarian organisation.'"

That has to be explained, because the Secretary-General is saying that he disapproves—no other interpretation is possible from his statement—of the action which is being taken in the name of the United Nations of which he is the titular head.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am following my hon. Friend's speech with great interest. Does he not agree

that those people who claim that the action is to sustain the United Nations are wrong, because the war itself represents a failure of the United Nations? The United Nations is an international body, designed, instituted and committed by charter to resolve conflict by peaceful means, not by war.

Mr. Dalyell: I agree not only politely but from the depth of my heart with the sentiment that my hon. Friend expresses. Emotionally and otherwise, I deeply agree with the point that he has put, extremely succinctly.

Mr. Doyle's report goes on:

"While making a final appeal to Saddam Hussein to pull out of Kuwait 24 hours before the beginning of hostilities, Mr. Perez de Cuellar said that people on both sides did not want war.

Signalling once again his displeasure with the turn of events, Mr. Perez de Cuellar, who is 71, said that even if asked by the Security Council to stay on as Secretary-General he would refuse to do so.

Last week Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Foreign Minister, launched a bitter attack on Mr. Perez de Cuellar accusing him of remaining silent while the allied forces targeted civilians."

So it goes on. Hon. Members can read the rest of the report for themselves. I simply ask the question: if that report or anything like it is true, what is Her Majesty's Government's view of the position of the Secretary-General?

I return to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). I want to read to the House a moving letter, pertinent to the point, from a friend of mine, Howard Kensett, of Eastbourne in Sussex. I have known him as a United Nations stalwart and enthusiast for many years, ever since he invited me to meetings in Sussex on United Nations ecologically related subjects. He says:

"The Gulf War is a blasphemy against the spirit and ideals set out in the United Nations Charter 45 years ago. The world appears to have learnt nothing.

The inspiring preamble to the charter begins: 'We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.'."

Mr. Kensett continued:

"As an enthusiastic member of the UN Association for over 30 years, I have been numbed by what has happened in the name of the only world-wide organisation to encompass so much of the world's concern for mankind. The Security Council, formed to resolve conflicts, has compounded the situation by permitting no negotiation or diplomacy except an ultimatum and deadline which offered no face-saving alternative. The Secretary General was given no specific role to play, and has complained that he only knew the war had started one and a half after zero.

In September I attended, as a delegate of the Eastbourne branch of the UN Association, a peace messengers' conference at the UN in New York, where we were told that the Voluntary Trust Fund for the Promotion of Peace stood at $22,000. I said that this was a disgrace.

Since then I have written to Mr. Major, Mr. Kinnock, and the Liberal Democrats. Mr. Hurd replied that 'the United Kingdom makes no contribution to the fund: we doubt its effectiveness and can make better use of its resources elsewhere. We do not intend to sponsor British delegates to future UN peace messengers for the same reason.' No money for peace, but billions—nay trillions, for war—what a comment on our civilisation."

Mr. Kensett speaks for many. If the Minister or I—or any other hon. Member—were a poor Egyptian or Arab peasant and saw that money being given to the United States and the United Kingdom by the Emirates, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia for war, we would begin to wonder why some of it did not come in our direction for economic development.

Page 2 of today's edition of *The Guardian* features a long article entitled "When UN resolutions met Iraqi resolve". It is, allegedly, a statement by the United Nations Secretary-General to the Security Council on 14 January 1991. Will the Minister comment on the following passages? If he wishes to give me a considered comment in writing, I shall make no fuss. The article states:

"Underlining a theme that had been emphasised during my meeting the previous evening with Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, the President said that it would not be possible in a single meeting to find 'ready solutions to such a complicated situation'. He noted that whereas resolution 598, which Iraq had accepted, set out a comprehensive approach to the issues addressed therein, the Security Council had not, regrettably, adopted a comprehensive approach in dealing with the present crisis."

Does that represent the facts? If so, it means that the criteria laid down by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas for a just war—that everything should be done to avoid it—have simply not been fulfilled.

The article continues:

"He pointed out that although Iraq had never accepted resolution 660, it had agreed, in the early days of the crisis, to attend a mini-summit in Jeddah and had begun to withdraw its troops from Kuwait. But those efforts, which he stated were aimed at achieving 'an Arab solution', were undermined by the introduction of foreign forces into the region, which heightened the threat posed to Iraq.

Criticising what he called 'precipitous' actions by the Security Council, he stated that Iraq had been tried in absentia and his Foreign Minister had been denied the facilities he needed to be able to present his case. Further, he stated that on earlier occasions when the Council had called for the withdrawal of troops, this had been accompanied by a call for negotiations between the parties; withdrawal had not been set as a precondition for such negotiations.

Moreover, he cited examples of Israeli occupation and annexation, noting that Israel had never been subjected to sanctions or outside military intervention as a means of ensuring compliance with Security Council resolutions."

I should like the Government to comment on that.

The House will forgive me for being personal. I am not an Arabic speaker, but both my mother and my father were fluent Arabic speakers and I was brought up in the belief that one had to be patient with Arabs. The Texan oil executives, Mr. Baker and Mr. Bush, seem to have been extremely aggressive and impatient in all their dealings. I want to know whether all that is printed in *The Guardian* is true. Either it is untrue, in which case it should be refuted, or it is true, in which case a great many questions have to be asked about the British Government's knowledge of the United Nations activities.

The quote continues:

"On two separate occasions during our meeting, the President called on me to use my good offices, saying that if the other parties were to permit me to play a role in search of a solution, Iraq would facilitate my task and co-operate with me. In response to my comment that this idea would be a non-starter if the position of Iraq was irreversible on the subject of withdrawal from Kuwait, the President reacted by saying that that was not what he meant. He reiterated that I should try to engage the views of the parties, including Iraq, in order to make proposals that could lead to a solution."

Is that or is that not true?

I quote now from extracts from the Iraqi transcript translated from the *al-Dustour* of Amman of 9 February. This is what is being said in the Arab world and this is what is believed in Jordan. A number of Jordanians have telephoned my hon. Friends and myself, including a

[Mr. Dalyell]

princess of Jordan, one of the ruling Hashemite family, who are exceedingly concerned about what has happened, for reasons that everyone knows. In Amman, it is published:

"Pérez de Cuéllar . . .'Now I do not want to argue with you, Your Excellency . . . but you have been the cause of this achievement for the Palestinian cause' . . .

Saddam Hussein: . . . 'From the year 1963 to 1968 Iraq was ruled by two weak brothers, and during their rule the sheikhs of Kuwait marched into the territory once again from Mitla to here, and then during the war with Iran they expanded again and exploited oil fields knowing from the very start that they were within the pre-August 2 1990 Iraq'".

That ties up with something that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) has been saying —to which borders does one withdraw?

I quote again:

"Pérez de Cuéllar: 'If you have this good case, you can go to the International Court of Justice.'

Saddam: 'We have said, and we still reiterate, that we desire peace and we are ready to bear our responsibilities as part of the international family of the UN, but are others ready to shoulder their responsibilities on the same grounds? Are they ready to respect international legitimacy and international law on the Middle East problem according to its background and to do justice to each issue?

'Notice what the American President said, that he speaks of formalties and does not touch on substantial issues which concern us as oppressed nations. He talks about the possibility of the withdrawal of ground forces after the crisis is over and does not mention anything about the withdrawal of naval and air forces.

Pérez de Cuéllar: 'These are not my resolutions. They are the resolutions of the Security Council.'

Saddam: 'These are American resolutions . . . it is the era of America. What America wants today is what happens, and not what the Security Council wants.'

Pérez de Cuéllar: 'I support you as far as the issue concerns me.'"

Did the Secretary-General of the United Nations actually say:

"I support you as far as the issue concerns me"?

Whether that is true or untrue, the House of Commons should know.

The interview continued in this way:

"Saddam: 'Let us go back to the law and how a member of this family'"—

he means the United Nations—

"is converted into the accused without listening to his defence.

You are the Secretary-General of the United Nations and despite this you have not been able to make it possible for the Iraqi Foreign Minister's aeroplane to land in the United States so that he may attend and defend the Iraqi point of view."

Some of us have been unhappy for a long time about the United Nations being physically in the United States. There is now a case for moving it elsewhere.

Perez de Cuellar's reply was:

"I tried . . . and I said that this is a violation of the headquarters agreement with the United States."

Did the Secretary-General really say this? If he did, it raises serious issues.

My next subject is the Government's assessment of many of the members of the United Nations whose Governments, to put it mildly, are under the most acute pressure. It is said in the Arab world that, if Saddam Hussein can stand against the might of the world for 40 days, he must be right. The war probably looks rather different from Cairo or from Damascus. I am told that we have achieved the near-impossible—bringing together the left in Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood.

I am not making this up. Let me quote from that impeccable Labour newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*. Alan Philps, of the foreign staff, wrote this:

"In non-combatant countries, the Saddam cult is becoming a focus for grievances against the government.

In Bangladesh the campaign for the general election scheduled for Feb 27 has been dominated by Gulf war agitation."

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West, who represents many Bangladeshis, knows that that is true. The article continues:

"The Iraqi embassy in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, has claimed to have handed out 1,000 poster portraits of Saddam to marchers . . .

In Malaysia, where more than half the population is Muslim, police found a home-made bomb containing nails and broken glass planted outside the American Airlines office in Kuala Lumpur . . .

Tension is also rising in Nigeria, where there have been pro-Iraqi demonstrations in the Muslim north of the country, particularly the city of Kano and the town of Kaduna . . .

The smaller Muslim nations of Africa—Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone—which have sent token contingents to Saudi Arabia, now find themselves open to accusations of being bribed by the Saudis."

I was chosen by Mr. Speaker to lead a parliamentary delegation to Zaire because of rain forest interests—hon. Friends of the Minister were members of the delegation —where we met the Zaire Foreign Minister, who was full of a meeting he had had with James Baker three days before. I asked him why Zaire was so definitely siding with the Americans. It was quite clear to all of us that it had nothing whatsoever to do with a judgment on the rights or wrongs of the situation in the middle east. It was all about Zaire's perception of obliging the Americans, so that a ban on aid to Zaire would be lifted—a ban which had been imposed because of that country's appalling human rights record. In a sense, that is corruption of the United Nations Security Council, and the same story could be told about the Ivory Coast vote in the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): This American-led war has been based upon mercenary and corrupt actions from the beginning. America did not pay its subs to the United Nations—it owed $135 million—until the day that it wanted a resolution passed about the 15 January start date for the war. The United States also bailed out Egypt, to the tune of $2·5 million, writing off its debts, and told Yemen that, if it voted with America, it would get other aid. The United States got money from Saudi Arabia and laundered it to Russia, so that the United States would keep its mouth shut while Russia did what it liked in Lithuania. The United States has been trying to cadge money from Germany and Japan, the two countries which supposedly lost the war in 1945. That tells us something about wars—the winners are not always winners for ever.

Mr. Dalyell: I must candidly tell the Minister that, when I first head my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) shout across the House that the war was "mercenary", I thought that he had gone over the top. After the past weekend I believe that, as so often before, my hon. Friend's insights were spot on. At the weekend, I said to my wife, "Dennis Skinner was right after all." Having thought that he was exaggerating, even I have now

come to the conclusion that the mercenary issue is very serious, but I shall not pursue it tonight, because I know that some of my hon. Friends wish to speak.

I am very worried about Tuwaitha, the nuclear facility in Iraq. For 24 years, I have been a weekly columnist of the *New Scientist* and I do not throw scientific facts around carelessly. As far as I know, it has never been satisfactorily explained what happens when a nuclear facility is bombed. I have always believed that, if one bombed nuclear reactors or certain types of nuclear research establishments, some sort of radiation would result.

I am told that no one in the west knows for certain what has happened in Iraq. There has been no monitoring. How do we know? I am not saying that this has happened, but how do we know that the most appalling Chernobyl-like effects have not resulted from the bombing of those nuclear facilities? People who drop bombs on nuclear facilities had better be clear what they are doing.

I am also worried about the bombing of Samarra, Kerbala and Najaf. I know perfectly well that Saddam Hussein probably put his chemical factories near to Samarra on purpose, and that there may well be missile boosting equipment near Najaf. However, they are holy places, and there is said to have been destruction.

I wrote to the Foreign Secretary about the damage and he replied that the Iraqis might well say that there had been damage when there was none. However, we have now seen pictures, apparently of Najaf—that has not been denied—showing considerable damage.

What is the Government's assessment of the effect on the Shi'ites? I shall leave any related matters pertaining to the Hajj to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West, who knows more about them than I do; but there is, I think, considerable concern about the holy places, and also about Babylon and Ur of the Chaldees. I have asked questions about that. If the Minister doubts what I have said, he should consider what he, as an art lover, would say if Durham, Stonehenge, Salisbury or Wells were destroyed by bombing. What would that do to the British?

Hon. Members may say that I am confining my examples to the Muslim world. I could choose the third world, but I can also choose our West German colleagues in the Social Democratic party. With, presumably, his party's authority, Karsten Voigt, a member of the Bundestag and foreign affairs spokesman for the SPD, has said:

> "In the present situation, the SPD calls upon all responsible parties to cease hostilities in order to recreate room for a political solution."

I feel no embarrassment about calling for a ceasefire, at least to give space for discussion. There may be military disadvantages, but there do not seem to many of us to be any military advantages in the current inhuman bombing.

It is not just the inhuman bombing, however. On 5 December, I asked General Colin Powell—upstairs, in Committee Room 14—about his view of the much-repeated ecological figures from the King of Jordan. Part of his reply was, "Well, they will set fire to the trenches. We know from our satellites that they are pouring in oil which can be ignited, using artesian methods. My tanks will have to go through canalised fire."

I take no joy in this, but what I predicted in the first part of my Consolidated Fund debate on 19 December has come true. As can be seen in column 403 of *Hansard*, I specifically drew attention to the awful oil slicks that are now threatening the Bahrainis, and also threatening the coral atolls that produce the larvae to feed the fish that provide a permanent supply of food for the people living around the Gulf. Let me ask—in brackets, as it were—what is happening to Qaruh and Umm Al Maradim, the coral atolls. The ecological disaster is simply enormous.

I may have spoken for longer than I should have, for some of my hon. Friends wish to speak as well. I beg the Minister, in these quiet circumstances, to try to provide answers to these urgent and extremely worrying questions.

9.27 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on securing tonight's debate and on his persistence in the face of all the difficulties involved in continuing to present this issue to the House.

In all seriousness, and with no sense of irony, let me also congratulate Mr. Perez de Cuellar on his sheer frankness and honesty. When he admitted to the world at large that he had not even known that war had begun until an hour and a half after the commencement of hostilities, we had to admire his candour. In the world of politics, at almost every level, there is always a great temptation for people to pretend that they know what is going on when they do not, lest they are thought to be less knowledgeable and powerful than they are. That man's honesty will go into the history books: people in future will ask, "What on earth was going on in the Gulf war?"—the "United Nations war" which was nothing of the kind, as the facts that unroll day by day are proving. It is farcical that a war allegedly waged in the name of the United Nations has been going on for three weeks, during which time the United Nations has not even met.

General Schwarzkopf, in his fairly frequent press interviews, has referred to his political masters in the United States. He has never referred to what the United Nations might have to say about the war. Well down a lengthy article in the *Evening Standard*, General Schwarzkopf was asked whether it was possible that, if Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons, the west would respond with nuclear weapons. He replied that there had been no consultation with the Allies. He did not even mention the United Nations. He said that President Bush would not be able to rule anything out. I do not know whether he intended to frighten the Iraqis, but he certainly frightened me.

The United Nations is certainly not in charge of this war. Various developments are unfolding. I ask the Government not merely to answer my questions but to take action on them. One arises out of a letter in today's *Glasgow Herald*. It was written by Canon Kenyon Wright, a man who has won a great deal of respect in Scotland, for various reasons. He mentions a letter that he had received from Church relief workers in Jordan. They told him that children in Jordan need baby milk powder but that they are not getting it. Three cargoes of baby milk powder had failed to reach those infants in Jordan because the American forces are not letting them through.

The writer of the letter to Canon Wright said that that is illegal. Due to the sheer confusion of war and battle, mistakes can be made. I hope the Government will take up that matter with their United States colleagues and get them to allow the supplies of baby milk powder to reach the infants in Jordan. We must ensure that the sad effects

[Mrs. Maria Fyfe]

and casualties of war are reduced as far as possible. When people are so gung-ho that they start to think in *Star* and *Sun* headlines, they seem to forget about human needs.

I wonder also whether the Government will take up a question that I understand American congressmen have taken up with their Government. We have not heard a cheep about it in the House of Commons. To this day, the United States is funding people who are carrying out acts of terrorism in El Salvador. Many United States senators and congressmen have said that they can hardly go about proclaiming that they care about human rights in Kuwait when acts of terrorism are being carried out against the people of El Salvador. They have at least the honesty and goodness to recognise the anomaly. Some members of the United States Government have responded to those criticisms, but I have yet to hear a cheep from any member of this Government about that. Are they not interested in human rights in central America?

We ought to think seriously about trying to find a way out of the war. There is no point in saying that we are right and that history will prove that we are right. We must endeavour to resolve the conflict as well as possible. The United Nations ought to keep on meeting until a way is found to resolve the conflict. We ought to be trying to find some way, under United Nations authority, of organising a ceasefire under conditions that all concerned find acceptable. The United Nations should keep on meeting until a solution is worked out. The alternative is for everyone to sit back and let the war rip. Death, casualties and carnage will then go on and on until someone is declared a winner. In the name of common sense, would it not be preferable to discuss continuously in the United Nations the issues that concern the warring nations, in an effort to resolve the conflict?

Arrangements ought to be put in hand for an international conference—a conference involving not just the nations concerned but the peoples concerned, such as the Kurds and the Palestinians—to make sure that at the end of this episode some kind of settlement will be worked out. We need a settlement that will not merely stop the fighting but will achieve lasting justice in the middle east. If we simply allow the war to continue, and a victor to emerge, we shall end up with the conditions to inspire another war in the future, just as the second world war followed the first.

I hope that the Government will listen to what some newspapers are pleased to call the peacemongers. I regard those people as the ones who are actually thinking about finding constructive ways out of the dreadful mess into which the Government have got this country.

9.35 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The whole House is once again greatly indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who initiated this important debate. This is the 27th day of the Gulf war. For every minute of those 27 days, there has been a bombing raid on Iraq. It has become very clear indeed, as each of those days has gone by, that this war has very little to do with freedom or democracy, but a great deal to do with America's determination to defend its oil interests and its ambition to extend its political influence in the region—political influence, so aptly described by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) as the new imperialism. It is indeed the new imperialism that we have seen so graphically demonstrated in the Gulf during the last 27 days.

It has been much more difficult to detect the underlying reasons for the turmoil that has gripped the Gulf—indeed, the whole of the middle east—in recent years. Clearly, those reasons are the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for a homeland and for independence, and the recognition by millions upon millions of poor Arabs that, in many Arab countries, the wealth deriving from oil is very unequally distributed. It is important to note that tonight, as during the past 27 days, British forces are seeking to defend one feudal family in Saudi Arabia and are fighting to restore another to Kuwait. If we believe in freedom and democracy, we must commit ourselves to ensuring that freedom and democracy will come to those Gulf countries one day.

Over the past 27 days we have been told that this war is approved, even sponsored, by the United Nations. Again it is becoming clearer and clearer that America hijacked the United Nations, that this war is American-inspired, American-led and American-dominated. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow referred to leaked documents that reveal the extent to which, before 15 January, Perez de Cuellar and the United Nations were marginalised and manipulated. It is very important to recall that, as my hon. Friend has mentioned, it was hours after the attack on Iraq had taken place that the United Nations Secretary-General was informed of it. *[Interruption.]*

I do not know why the Minister is getting so annoyed. Could it be because this is the first debate on the Gulf and the United Nations initiated by my hon. Friend? The consensus between the Government and the official Opposition amounts to a conspiracy of silence to ensure that the House will not have an opportunity to speak out in the names of the 10 million or 11 million British citizens who are totally opposed to this war. Could it be that the Minister is upset because he is required, at the end of this debate, to come to the Dispatch Box and defend the war—defend it in the name of the House of Commons, which during the past 27 days has been denied any genuine opportunity to debate it?

In particular, I hope that the Minister will comment on the war aims of Her Majesty's Government, remembering that we are embroiled in this venture on the coat-tails of the new imperialism that the United States of America seems determined to introduce in the Gulf region.

We are worried about the war aims, which seem to be confused and contradictory. The Secretary of State for Defence said some time ago that this war would be short, sharp and quick. Yet 27 days later, he said on BBC Radio:

> "If Saddam and his forces merely withdraw to the border and we did see the liberation of Kuwait, but all the Iraqi guns and all the military machines were left on the other side of the border merely to repeat the exercise as soon as the allies went away,. that would simply not see the achievement of that resolution. I think people understand that it has to be right after all the effort, all the cost and all the pain that we've been involved in. We can't leave it half finished with a continuing menace continuing to threaten other states in the area."

Those are the war aims spelled out by the Secretary of State for Defence on 27 January. He repeated them precisely two days later, during Defence Question Time. Following that, the Prime Minister, when asked, said that

our war aims were entirely in line with the United Nations resolution, and he uttered no word of repudiation of what the Secretary of State for Defence had said.

We have heard some different war aims from the Foreign Secretary. His character is gentler and more civilised than that of the Secretary of State for Defence, and his war aims are significantly different. It is not without significance that Labour's shadow Foreign Secretary prefers the war aims of the Foreign Secretary.

Let there be no misunderstanding that what is happening is the destruction of Iraq. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said, power stations are being obliterated, as are water supplies and all the needs of everyday life. Imagine what will happen in a few weeks, in the heat of the summer in temperatures of 100 deg or 120 deg F. Think of the illness and disease that will sweep Iraq at that time.

We should think also of how much Arab opinion is already alienated from America, Britain and the other states in the coalition. We all know that the coalition is America and, in a secondary way, Britain. We should think how difficult it will be for Arab states inside and outside the coalition to maintain their stability because of the alienation that grows deeper every day that the war continues.

In my view, now is the time for the United Nations to exert itself. The Security Council should have been in permanent session since the start of the war. It should have been picking up all the initiatives that have been made by Iran, India, the non-aligned nations, the Maghreb countries and Russia. All those initiatives have been taken in the past few days in an effort to achieve peace. We need a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement. We all know in our hearts that, if that peace is to be real and genuine and to lead to peace and stability in the Gulf region, it has to be worked out by Arabs. It cannot be imposed by external forces—and most of all, it cannot be imposed by the new imperialists.

9.44 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Words have lost their meaning, and values and ideas have been stood on their head by the operation of the war. Those of us who favour bringing British troops home are said not to support the troops, when, in reality, we are the people who wish to save their lives. Those of us who have all along stood by the principles for which the United Nations stands are said to be anti-United Nations because we have voted against the Government, who claim that resolution 678 is a mandate from the United Nations to take the action that they are taking in the Gulf. I object strongly to being called anti-United Nations.

Clause IV(7) of the Labour party constitution spells out our commitment to international principles and stands by the United Nations. It states that its objectives are

"to co-operate with the labour and socialist organisation in other countries and to support the United Nations Organisation and its various agencies and other international organisations for the promotion of peace, the adjustment and settlement of international disputes by conciliation or judicial arbitration, the establishment and defence of human rights, and the improvement of the social and economic standards and conditions of work of the people of the world."

There is no way in which the action taken by the allied coalition forces could be said to be in keeping with any of those principles. I do not believe that allied forces are acting in conformity with the resolutions passed by the United Nations.

Resolution 678 states that in certain circumstances all necessary means can be used. We are using wholly unnecessary and counter-productive means in the present circumstances. Resolution 678 also endorses all the previous United Nations resolutions on the Gulf crisis, including resolution 666, which calls for foodstuffs and medical supplies to be made available in Iraq and Kuwait in certain circumstances. Those circumstances were envisaged to be the application of the sanctions. Sanctions still apply, but in the context of a massive bombardment of the Iraqi people. Those circumstances are endorsed by resolution 678.

I shall quote from and explain the early-day motion on United Nations resolution 666 which I tabled today. It states:

"That this House notes that the much-quoted Resolution 678 of the United Nations reaffirms all previous United Nations Resolutions on the Gulf crisis, including Resolution 666."

Conservative Members may say, "resolution 660", but there are a number of resolutions, and resolution 666 happens to be one of them. The early-day motion

"calls for particular attention to 'be paid to such categories of persons who might suffer specially, such as the children under 15 years of age, expectant mothers, maternity cases, the sick and the elderly' and recognises 'that circumstances may arise in which it will be necessary for foodstuffs to be supplied to the civilian population in Iraq or Kuwait in order to relieve human suffering', plus medical supplies; and also notes that Resolution 678 is ambiguous about the means it sanctions to ensure that Iraqi Armed Forces withdraw from Kuwait, but recognises that this element of the Resolution has been interpreted by the governments forming the coalition of Allied Forces to justify a continuous massive bombing raid on Iraq and Kuwait and that the situation has thereby been created whereby Resolution 666 should now engage world attention, and that the supply of foodstuffs and medical supplies to the categories of people mentioned above can only meaningfully be undertaken given an end, or at least a pause, to mass bombing."

Presumably, resolution 666 is as significant in terms of the Gulf crisis as resolution 678. We should now be forced to find a means of pursuing resolution 666 and looking after the groups of people who have been sorely treated in the massive bombing throughout Iraq—especially in areas in the south such as Basra, of which we hear little, but where ports, docks, marshalling yards and railway stations are intimately linked to residential areas, schools and hospitals and where the destruction must be phenomenal. That should be a matter of the greatest concern to us. We should be finding out what is happening and taking steps to overcome the problems.

Fortunately, the United Nations is doing something at least in that direction. The United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organisation have set up a mission to send emergency medical supplies to children and mothers in Iraq. It will start with Baghdad, but I hope that, when its members get there and discover what the position is, they will try to find out what is going on in other areas of Iraq, including Basra—an area in which I have a specific interest.

Another idea that has been turned on its head is the position that people such as I have adopted towards the British troops. I served for two years in Basra and I hope that I therefore have some sympathy for the British troops and an understanding of their circumstances, as well as some concern for the Iraqi citizens—the people with whom

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

I mixed and with whom I worked while I was serving with an RAF movements unit there. I worked closely with people in the docks and railways and in shipping. It is those people and their children who have been severely hit by the action.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): My hon. Friend mentioned his position regarding the troops in the Gulf. I wrote to every one of the troops who were mentioned in my local evening paper—which gave an address and asked people to write—offering my support and pledging that we were trying to find a peaceful solution. I am now receiving letters back from those troops, every single one of whom supports our position. They are wonderful letters and I promise to let my hon. Friend see them. He will then be as convinced as I am that we are absolutely right to try to spare them a terrible fate.

Mr. Barnes: Every hon. Member must have at least 50 people from his constituency among the troops in the Gulf; in my case, it is probably more. I object to the nonsense that is appearing in the *Daily Star* to the effect that we are anti-troops. The troops and their parents and relatives in this country may be in need of all kinds of assistance and may need their Member of Parliament to deal with officialdom on their behalf. They may be deterred from seeking our advice by the nonsense that is appearing in the mass media. That is a dangerous state of affairs. We need to take action and to say that we are their representatives and that British troops and their relatives can turn to us perhaps more readily than they can turn to those hon. Members who regard the troops merely as cannon fodder and who are not interested in their lives and well-being.

It is imperative that we start to push the United Nations to try to overcome the problems and to move towards periods of ceasefire, so that we can put a stop to this nonsense.

9.54 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Hon. Members such as those present tonight who ask critical questions on the Gulf war do not intend any reflection whatever on our forces in the Gulf. It is a foul and wicked lie for anyone to use that argument against those of us who talk about peace and a ceasefire so that the men and women in the forces do not have to face the possibility of death and mutilation for an instant longer than is made necessary by the force of the prevailing circumstances.

The Congress of the United States dealt with the Gulf war far and away more openly and better than did the mother of Parliaments. There was an agreement and a conspiracy in the House to have a joint resolution of the House. No alternative vote or voice was permitted by joint consensus. It is amazing that, in the debate on 21 January, certain hon. Members were called, when the overwhelming body of opinion among Opposition Members who wanted to speak was against the war. That expression of opinion was denied by that self-same shabby conspiracy. There is no question about that in my mind.

The supporters of this dreadful war talk about supporting the authority of the United Nations. But the authority of the United Nations has been weakened. The United Nations was established to resolve international conflicts by peaceful means. If a country goes to war with the authority of the United Nations, which the Americans claim to have, that is a failure. But we know that to declare war is an important and serious decision. That decision was not made under the required terms of concurrence of all the parties, because China abstained. Technically, it meant that the decision was not in conformity with the United Nations charter. It was an illegality—the sort of argument that could be pored over by international lawyers and courts. But the illegality was shoved to one side and we went to this dreadful war.

Of course, the United States bribed certain nations, such as the Soviet Union, to stay out of the war and others, such as Egypt, to stay in the war. The idea that this is a war of principle is a mischievous deception on our nation and the rest of the world. What is the war for? Of course we oppose the invasion of Kuwait, but when we liberate Kuwait shall we liberate the working men and women of Kuwait? Of course not. We shall restore a feudal autocracy which, shortly before the dispute began suspended Parliament and suppressed student expression of discontent with excessive brutality and zeal.

The Government talk about the authority of the United Nations. The Minister can tell us about it tonight. He will have half an hour, which is as much as a Minister has in a full day's debate. He will have until half-past ten. If the Government care about the United Nations, do they intend to honour the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty to which Iraq is a signatory and which Iraq has honoured? The Minister knows that maintaining Polaris—thank God Holy Loch is to be closed—and purchasing Trident is in clear breach of the United Nations treaty. If the Government are willing to support the United Nations over Kuwait, they should support it on other matters. I am talking about double standards. It is convenient to support the United Nations in the Gulf, but it is not convenient to support the United Nations in its bid to get rid of nuclear weapons. However, that should be done.

There will be no winners from the war. Millions of people in the middle east will feel nothing but contempt and hatred for the United States, and—alack, alas—for the United Kingdom, which has a special relationship with the United States. That special relationship means that we do the bidding of the United States. We have been sucked unnecessarily into this war and we shall face vitriol and hatred from many millions of people throughout the Muslim world. I do not say that as a person who accepts the view of the Muslim world uncritically.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Mr. Cryer: I do not accept the views of the Muslim world uncritically, as those who know my record on the publication of "The Satanic Verses" and the attack on Salman Rushdie will testify. However, Muslims have a right to their religion, their holy places, their cohesion and commonality on the planet. This war will divide nations, not unite them. It will deepen hatreds and divisions between peoples of the world, and that can only be to our harm.

The General Assembly, not just the Security Council, of the United Nations must be invoked so that it can once again wrest control of the terrible conflict from the hands

of the United States and put it back where it belongs. When that happens, the United Nations should also issue a clear commitment to bring the conflict to an end and to produce satisfactory peace terms.

10.1 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) got the Adjournment debate tonight, and I also compliment those people who managed to collapse the previous debates to allow more than one or two hon. Members to speak in this one. No doubt the Tory Whips will have their knuckles rapped for allowing the debate to collapse——

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Leeds, North-East): The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman, who is not supposed to speak, tells me that I have got it wrong, but the truth is that the Tory Whips allowed the business to collapse and that has enabled——

Mr. Greg Knight (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Very good.

Mr. Skinner: This is not the supper club—this is supposed to be democracy. This is where we speak in the open, talk to one another, in the hope that we transmit some information to the world outside so that those opinion polls that have been twisted can reflect more fairly the views not only of those in the House, but the people outside.

Tomorrow, the United Nations should have its session in public. Tomorrow's meeting should not be secret, but I have no doubt that that suits the Americans who are leading the war and those who are tagging along such as the new Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence and all the rest of them. They are little more than American poodles, because nearly everyone in the street knows what this war is about. It is not about democracy for, if it was, what the hell are we doing having British troops risking their lives on the desert sand while the Kuwaiti royal family are in the gambling dens and the casinos, gallivanting around the world and living in hotels in Cairo? According to newspapers, those hotels are costing $3,000 a month. They are lapping it up and one of the Kuwaitis in those hotels said, "Well, Kuwait is not really a country, it is a country club." They are watching the war on television. While our people are risking their lives, they are having a great time. Those people, 25 of them with the same surname, will be back in Parliament in Kuwait when it is free.

The war is not about democracy, or principle. If it were, why would the British Prime Minister be racing about with others from the Tory Government begging money from anyone they meet in the street? If one were fighting a war about principle, one would not be money grubbing. This is a mercenary war. If money of that scale had been asked for 10 or 15 years ago for South Africa, everyone would have said that that was a mercenary war and "Mad Mike" Hoare would have been running it.

This war is all about America. It has seen that Russia has problems of its own with nationalism and economic troubles. It knows that it has a chance to move into a part of the world where it has never had an opportunity to be since the end of the second world war. The power vacuum in the middle east enabled the United States to move in while Russia has troubles of its own. It launders money from Saudi Arabia and says to Russia, "Here is $4 billion to keep your mouth shut," and to Egypt, "Here is $3·5 billion to write off your third-world debts." It says, "Anybody else want money?" It begs off Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and launders the money to different countries. Then it has the cheek to tell us that it is all about a great principle. It is not about a great principle at all.

Of course, there is another factor. When elected President of the United States, George Bush was regarded as a wimp. Everybody knew him to be a wimp. He wanted to be Rambo; he wanted to be macho. This enables him to have an opportunity to change his image in the United States in order to get re-elected. In the process, thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, will be slaughtered, but it will not be Bush, it will not be Stormin' Norman, it will not be Colin Powell. It will not be all the armchair generals who tell us about the war. It will not be the Tory MPs in the Government and the Cabinet. They will not lose their lives, they will not put on flak jackets as the Secretary of State for the Environment did once before. He was the man who did his national service but who bought himself out after a few months. They march through the Lobby saying, "We are prepared to send our troops to the battlefield in order to fight for Kuwait and hand it back to the royal family."

Then we see the bombs and read about the shells. We see all the Tornados going under. We count the cost—£21 million for a Tornado, £750,000 for a Tomahawk missile. When I see that, I say to myself that that is the peace dividend gone. We talked about the ending of the cold war and what we would do with the money. The Tories said that they would cut defence expenditure. The Liberals as usual said that they would cut defence expenditure. The Labour party said, "When in government we will cut defence expenditure." Everybody looked forward to more hospitals, more homes to get rid of cardboard city, and proper cold weather payments week in and week out without pensioners having to beg for them. Then we pick up the newpapers every day and see all those munitions being fired in Kuwait and in the desert. The peace dividend is being blasted into smithereens in the Persian Gulf.

We are supposed to accept that. I have not been sent to Parliament to send people to die for these feudal dynasties in the middle east. At the end of it, what happens? People say that war is quick. Sometimes it ain't. The trouble is that some people in this building remember only the Falklands; that is all they remember. It was a short war. There were a few explosions here and there and a few hundred were killed, more Argentines than Britons. There were great celebrations at the dock side.

This might be a long war. If it is, there will be a lot more casualties and people will have different perspectives about it. The jingoism may change if it drags on through a long hot summer. What will happen? The views of people who said, "Let's get stuck in and get this finished," may change. Too many people think that sanctions would have lasted too long, but what about a war that lasts too long?

Of course, after a war people finish up victorious, but what does it do to a generation of young people? It gives them the impression that the way to resolve problems in the world is not by diplomacy, negotiation or the use of tact and skill, but by killing people. It will educate another generation into the belief that that is the way to do things. Yet people tell me that when it is all over we can have a

[Mr. Skinner]

new world order—a new world order based upon killing, brutality and the massacre of innocent men, women and children out there in the middle east. I do not believe that.

That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow was right to raise the matter. That is why it is important to study the views of other people. It is important to raise these issues. Much could be said about the war, but one thing is certain: everyone who sold arms to Saddam is as guilty as everyone else—the whole lot of them. If they did not sell the arms, they provided them with the machine tools to make them, and with all the equipment. Right up to the nether end, they were writing off Iraq's debts and increasing the Export Credits Guarantee Department's money to about £400 million. They did everything possible to build up that monster, Saddam Hussein.

Then they have the cheek to tell us that we cannot have the motion put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), to say that, although we support people who will lay down their lives in the desert, we prefer peace. The opposite to war is not appeasement —in our language, it is peace, and it is time that we gave it a chance.

10.10 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): My speech will be exceedingly brief. Further to a comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) about the supply of arms to Saddam Hussein, there is no doubt on either side of the House that Saddam Hussein must not be allowed to benefit from his occupation of Kuwait. That is unarguable. Saddam Hussein is an evil and wicked person. There are many such people in the world, but he qualifies as one of the worst.

However, Labour Members were telling the Government for many years just how evil that man was. We were telling them that he was evil when Ministers were going to Baghdad, were being pictured with Saddam Hussein, and were encouraging him to take up trade credits. Britain was at the Baghdad international trade fair. It is amazing that we are now being told that that man is a monster. We accept that, but why, when we were saying so, were we ignored or laughed at and then told cynically by Ministers, "Well, if we don't provide the technology, if we don't trade with him, someone else will"? We do not need to be lectured by the Government about how evil Saddam Hussein is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover mentioned arms. The current edition of *Time* magazine on the Gulf war sets out graphically the armaments available to Saddam Hussein. An American first lieutenant, Alan Leclerc—a US marine pilot who flies daily—used a poignant phrase when he said:

"It angers me. Countries of the world need to be a little more discreet about whom they sell weapons to, and that includes us."

Those American, British and French pilots who have been risking their lives realise that they are facing weaponry that was provided by their own countries. The list of weapons is a list of shame.

The missiles were provided by the Soviet Union; France provided the Exocet missiles that are still there, perhaps poised, waiting to strike at our troops. The tanks were provided by the Soviet Union; the artillery—apparently some of the finest in the world—was provided by South Africa. The aircraft were provided by France and the Soviet Union. Mines were provided by the Soviet Union, Taiwan, Italy and others. Brazil provided fire-controlled radars; Britain provided training and equipment; France provided point defence radars.

We were still training Iraqi troops in this country until a few months ago and now we are told that Saddam Hussein is a monster. When we said so, we were ignored. I do not like the Government's hypocrisy. They now accuse us of being appeasers or, as some of the gutter press suggest, traitors. We have been loyal to the British people from the beginning and have always wanted to ensure that no British military person should lose his life in this shabby war.

As for principles, President Bush would not know a principle if it were stuck on the end of an Exocet and smashed straight through his head. That great, principled politician ordered the invasion of Panama. We do not want to hear about principles but about peace, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said. We want to ensure that the United Nations is used to resolve those regional conflicts by peaceful means. Surely the new world order is that we talk peacefully and in a civilised fashion about how we reconcile our differences, not how we throw our young people against each other and see them killed and maimed.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): This has been a highly charged debate, and I recognise the feelings that have been expressed. I realise that some hon. Members have been kind enough to refrain from speaking in order to give me an opportunity to reply, and that is important in any democratic assembly. I was fearful earlier that I would not have an opportunity to state the Government's position.

Let me make one or two general points fundamentally clear at the outset. Our objectives and the objectives of the alliance, and our actions in the hostilities, are all conducted under the authority of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Hon. Members who have waxed strong and indignant have failed to recognise the import and meaning of resolution 678, which authorises the use of all necessary means to seek the objectives of resolution 660.

Hon. Members have argued that hostilities were not necessary; that hostilities should not have been indulged in. But if Saddam Hussein would not respect United Nations resolutions under the relentless bombing that his armed forces have undoubtedly suffered, under the relentless attack on his armed forces and their installations that he has undoubtedly suffered, how does any hon. Member imagine that he might have left Kuwait under the pressure of sanctions?

There are one or two matters which might have been mentioned amidst all the moral indignation and fervour expressed by Labour Members. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said that our objective was merely to restore a feudal autocracy. He made no mention of the size of the gigantic Iraqi war machine, which has been so amply demonstrated in recent weeks, or why he felt that that war machine had been assembled. No hon. Member mentioned the rape of Kuwait, Amnesty International's report, the enormous bloodshed that has

been caused to the people of Kuwait, the allegations that we have all heard about the incubators and the dreadful suffering that was caused to Kuwaiti citizens.

One further thing of which there has been no mention amidst all the moral indignation is the outrageous treatment of our 10 prisoners of war. Not one hon. Member suggested any indignation that those poor men should have been paraded in their state on television contrary to the Geneva convention. Not one person expressed any outrage or indignation at the fact that there has been no access to them, not even by the Red Cross, and no list has been provided of who they are or there whereabouts.

Ms. Mahon: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No, I shall not give way. This has been a long debate. Hon. Members have had an opportunity to speak, and I really must have an opportunity to reply.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned one thing that I shall pick up, because it is of personal interest to me. He said that he was not an Arabic speaker but that his parents were. I am, in some way, an Arabic speaker. I believe that I am the only Arabic speaker in the House. When I hear all the expressions of outrage and feeling about Palestinians and Jordan, I would only say that I have been to Jordan on more occasions than I can count. I have lived there, and I honestly think that I know it fairly well and that I can claim as much knowledge of it as any other hon. Memer—or at least, I did once. I count many Jordanians and Palestinians as my friends.

Hon. Members will be aware that the Foreign Office is not without its Arabists. One of the impressions that I have gained over the few months that I have been in the Foreign Office is that, to a man, the Arabists recognise, albeit reluctantly and unhappily—as we all do, because we all regret war—that ultimately it was necessary that hostilities were used under the authority of the United Nations resolution 678. It could not be avoided.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No, I will not give way. I have only 10 minutes to reply to the debate; the right hon. Gentleman must respect that.

I have a few words to say about the resolutions of the Security Council. The first of the Council's resolutions—660—was adopted within hours of the invasion. There were no votes against and no abstentions. It condemned the invasion and called for immediate and unconditional Iraqi withdrawal.

The second resolution followed only four days later. Resolution 661 imposed comprehensive trade and financial sanctions on Iraq and occupied Kuwait. It also established a sanctions committee. Three days later, resolution 662 was adopted unanimously, declaring that Iraq's purported annexation of Kuwait was null and void.

The test of whether sanctions worked was whether they brought Saddam Hussein to change his policies and withdraw from Kuwait as the Security Council demanded. They did not. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary concluded on 15 January, sanctions would not achieve such a decisive rundown of Saddam Hussein's military machine that he would leave Kuwait. Meanwhile, five months had elapsed and his brutal occupation of Kuwait continued. The atrocities committed by the Iraqi forces in Kuwait have been well documented by Amnesty International and others. Waiting longer for sanctions to work was therefore not an option.

I have to reiterate that it was the international community which decided that sanctions were not enough, when the Security Council adopted its resolution 678 on 29 November. To remind hon. Members, this authorised member states to use "all necessary means" to implement earlier relevant resolutions of the Council in the absence of Iraqi compliance by 15 January. Despite this 45-day pause of good will, Iraq ignored the deadline completely. Consequently, with the full authority of the United Nations, the allied coalition embarked on military operations against Iraq.

The Government's position is clear. Allied operations have been directed against Iraq's massive military machine sustaining the illegal occupation of Kuwait. Any such attacks, if necessary for the purposes specified in resolution 678, are fully within the authorisation granted by that resolution. It is absurd to suggest that these operations could be confined in a modern war to the geographical territory of Kuwait. That would not deal effectively with Iraqi aggression. We have made it amply clear that our objectives are to get Iraq out of Kuwait completely, to see the legitimate Kuwaiti Government restored, to uphold the authority of the United Nations, and to re-establish international peace and security in the area. This does not entail the destruction, occupation or dismemberment of Iraq. It is not for us to decide who governs Iraq.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred to the pounding of Baghdad. I think that he might have been intending to refer to the pounding of the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. It has been the clearest possible intention of all allied operations to avoid civilian casualties. We have also made it clear that we are doing everything possible to keep civilian casualties to a minimum, and to avoid damaging sites of religious and cultural significance. We have reported as much to the Security Council, in a series of reports since hostilities began. The military action will end as soon as the purposes laid down by the Security Council have been achieved.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred to Babylon, Ur of the Chaldees, Najaf and Kerbek. There is no evidence that those sites have been struck. I remind him that, had there been evidence, it would have been available in photographic form, and we should surely have seen it. Would he not consider contrasting that lack of evidence with the terror tactics deployed by the Iraqis in launching Scud missiles on innocent civilians and the risks to mosques and holy places occasioned by such indiscriminate attacks?

The 12 Security Council resolutions form a landmark in UN history. They have all been adopted with overwhelming majorities. They have been characterised by the closest co-operation between the five members of the Council.

I am very glad that we have had this debate, because it allows me, on behalf of the Government, to express our clear view of the importance of the United Nations in handling this major international crisis. Iraq has chosen, at every opportunity, to react to the UN action with invective in denying the authority of the Council—a sea change indeed from the time, during the Iran-Iraq war, when the Iraqis claimed to be its most fervent supporters.

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

The invective has been directed not only against the council but also against the UN Secretary-General. I am sure that the House will join me in paying tribute to Mr. Perez de Cuellar, who has time and again made every effort to act as a messenger and peace broker.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow called for a ceasefire, as have other hon. Members. Others have called for the Security Council or the UN Secretary-General now to call for a ceasefire or a pause in hostilities, to allow Saddam Hussein a chance to respond. But what evidence do we have that Saddam Hussein is prepared to listen? What evidence is there that he is now more prepared than before to heed the demands reflected in all these resolutions? The abuse of the Security Council and the Secretary-General in Tariq Aziz's two letters make it clear that nothing has changed. Saddam Hussein continues to thumb his nose at international opinion, international law and humanitarian obligations.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear on 20 January, we do not want the conflict to continue a day longer than necessary. We do not wish to risk the lives of our forces, if implementation of the Security Council resolutions can be achieved by peaceful means. But we do not favour a pause or a ceasefire. We had a pause for good will until 15 January.

Our forces are now engaged. We cannot agree to any suspension of hostilities which would allow Saddam Hussein to regroup and strengthen his position, simply in the hope that this might lead to negotiations. Hostilities cannot end—or pause—until we know that all Iraqi forces are out of Kuwait. The United Nations should not settle for less.

10.29 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): When this debate is read in future, it will be seen to have been the beginning of the end of the United Nations, because of the use made of it by the American and British Governments. This Government left UNESCO because they did not agree with the UN. The Americans left UNESCO. The American and British Governments have brought the Security Council in, and now the most murderous bombing of innocent men, women and children in Iraq is being done in the name of the United Nations.

Tonight, the House has reflected more faithfully the concerns of decent people, who believe in the United Nations, than all the speeches made by the Conservative party since the crisis began. I warn the Minister that, if this is the way in which the Government aims to use the United Nations, we shall indeed fall back into the barbarism from which the UN was intended to rescue us.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For the county constituency of Ribble Valley, in the room of the right hon. David Charles Waddington, QC, called up to the House of Peers.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sudan

1. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the situation in the Sudan.

18. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is making representations to the Sudanese Government about the situation in the Sudan.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): We have serious differences with the Sudanese Government over their policies on the Gulf conflict, human rights, and terrorism. We are also most concerned about their failure to co-ordinate effectively with foreign relief agencies in order to deal with the major famine that is in prospect. We have made our position on these issues clear to the Sudanese authorities.

Mr. Day: What representations have Her Majesty's Government made to the Government of Sudan about the latter's rather unhelpful approach to the Gulf crisis?

Mr. Hogg: The Government of Sudan are one of the few Governments in the world who have given support to the Government of Iraq. That is wrong in principle and it is contrary to the interests of the Sudan. We have made both those things clear to the Sudanese Government.

Mr. Stanbrook: That huge country, with its immense resources and its wonderful people, has not enjoyed political stability since it was under British administration. Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that Britain has a vast reservoir of experience and expertise with regard to the problems of the Sudan which is not sufficiently tapped? Will he please ensure that that resource, which is available to Her Majesty's Government and to the authorities in the Sudan, is used for the mutual benefit of both countries?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I am aware that the Sudanese civil service attracted some of the ablest administrators in the colonial service and there is thus a pool of informed opinion. I shall give careful thought to my hon. Friend's ingenious suggestion.

Mr. Anderson: I fully support the Government's robust response to the release on 7 January by the Sudanese Government of the terrorists who murdered five British citizens. Will the Minister say a little more about the extent of the co-operation between Sudan and Iraq in the Gulf war? For example, Christian Sudanese from the south say that chemical weapons have been supplied by Iraq to the Sudanese Government and ABC News recently carried a report that before the conflict Iraq had positioned combat aircraft and missiles via Port Sudan in Sudan itself for possible use against strategic targets either in Saudi Arabia or against targets such as the Aswan dam in Egypt.

Mr. Hogg: As regards the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, yes there have been rumours to the effect that Iraq has been basing equipment of various kinds in the Sudan, but we have no evidence to substantiate them. Our view would be that that would be wrong in principle and contrary to the interests of the Sudan. As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I am grateful to him for the support that he has given to the Government for the way we responded to the disgraceful decision to release the terrorists who murdered five British citizens and two others.

Cambodia

2. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government propose to take any initiative in the United Nations to seek an immediate ceasefire of hostilities in Cambodia.

16. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the situation in Cambodia; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): Britain has contributed fully to the agreement between the Permanent Five and the co-chairmen of the Paris conference on Cambodia on a draft comprehensive settlement document, an integral part of which is a monitored ceasefire. We continue to pursue the early implementation of these proposals.

Mr. Wallace: Can the Minister confirm that one of the provisions of the United Nations peace plan is such that a ceasefire cannot be implemented, nor can the external supply of arms be discontinued until a date is agreed for the implementation of the plan? A meeting to try to arrange a date seems to be becoming increasingly bogged down and is not happening. He must be aware of the public's great concern about the carnage that has taken place in Cambodia. Can the Government take any fresh initiative to hasten the day when a ceasefire will be possible and will not not necessarily be dependent upon the United Nations peace plan?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We constantly urge a ceasefire. Our objective—with our friends and partners, notably the permanent members of the Security Council—is to work for a comprehensive political settlement which includes a

ceasefire. The consensus between the Permanent Five, the Paris conference co-chairmen and the United Nations on the draft settlement document must provide an opportunity for the Paris conference to reconvene one day and to adopt a settlement.

Mr. Cryer: Are not people a little suspicious of the Government's intentions when the Government have been involved in training members of the Khmer Rouge, which includes the Pol Pot faction? Does not the United Nations settlement involve a ceasefire which disarms the Cambodian Government before the Khmer Rouge, including the Pol Pot faction? As the British Government are so concerned about containing aggression, why are they not doing more to aid the Cambodian Government, supported by Vietnam, to resist encroachments by the Pol Pot faction which, as the Minister will readily acknowledge, has one of the worst records in existence for battering human rights?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have repeatedly stated, and I shall state it again today, that there has never been and there is no Government involvement of any kind in training, equipping or co-operating with the Khmer Rouge. The hon. Gentleman should use his undoubted energies in the direction of encouraging a comprehensive peace settlement. In that way, we would create the conditions to enable the Cambodian people to elect a Government, free from fear of foreign invasion and civil war or Khmer Rouge atrocities.

Mr. Lester: As regards getting a comprehensive settlement, which is what we all seek, will my hon. Friend consider ensuring that a member of our foreign service goes to talk to the Phnom Penh Government? There are difficulties with the interpretation of the United Nation plan and it would be helpful if we used our diplomatic skills to get over them. Also, will he consider the position of the camps in Thailand, where we are feeding people who are party to a civil war and not under United Nations control?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no objection to talking to representatives of the Phnom Penh regime to urge them to co-operate in restoring peace to Cambodia on the basis of the Permanent Five's framework. It is certainly the case also that we support efforts to improve the lot of displaced people in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border.

Mr. Allason: Given Mr. John Pilger's apparent success in perpetuating the myth that the SAS and other British units have been training the Pol Pot regime and its supporters, has the Foreign Office given any consideration to employing Mr. Pilger as a propagandist against the regime in Baghdad?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign Office has made clear its fundamental disagreement with so many of Mr. Pilger's allegations.

Intergovernmental Conferences

3. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the intergovernmental conferences.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Both intergovernmental conferences were opened on 15 December, in Rome. The conference on European monetary union met again on 28 January, attended by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I attended a meeting of the political union conference on 4 February. Ministers' personal representatives are also meeting weekly. The United Kingdom is playing a full and constructive role in both conferences.

Mr. Favell: The EC conferences are about the future control of our economic, foreign and defence policies—the hallmarks of an independent state. Does it not strike my right hon. Friend as odd that at a time when, quite rightly, our troops are in the Gulf to restore independence in Kuwait, we should talk about giving away our own independence?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure that the two situations are entirely comparable. So far as we are concerned, the two conferences are exercises to see whether we can co-operate more effectively with our partners in Europe. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not suppose that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's plan for a hard ecu, or the ideas that I am quoting in the other conference for stimulating the role of national parliaments in controlling the Community and for more effective compliance by member states of European decisions that they have already accepted in theory, involve any sacrifice of independence on our part.

Mr. Shore: The Foreign Secretary has given an unusually bland and uninformative reply. He surely recognises the great interest that there is in the progress of the talks on the intergovernmental conferences—particularly that on political union, for which the right hon. Gentleman is more directly responsible. Will the Foreign Secretary keep the House informed as to the substance of the talks at the meeting on 4 February? Will he also ensure that, in future, a separate statement is made whenever the right hon. Gentleman returns from Brussels, Luxembourg, or wherever it may be, so that the House will be kept fully informed?

Mr. Hurd: I always try to ensure that the House is kept properly informed. On 4 February, we had a general discussion in the intergovernmental conference on the subject of foreign policy. I maintained the view that there is everything to be said for working together effectively, and in trying to agree a line and implementing it—but that would not be achieved by playing about with majority voting or procedures.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it has become clear from events in the Gulf that the intergovernmental conference ought not to come to any conclusion that the defence of western Europe should be handed over to the Community? Will he use his best endeavours to strengthen the Western European Union, which is the right organisation, as the European pillar of NATO?

Mr. Hurd: So far as we and most members of the Community are concerned, there is no question of trying to load on to the EC the responsibility for our defence that is shouldered by NATO. There is a question of how far we can build up the WEU, as my hon. Friend knows and approves, but the essence of our defence will continue to lie in the Atlantic alliance.

Mr. Robertson: Why, even at this late stage, with the intergovernmental conferences now involving weekly meetings of officials, do we still not have the Government's promised paper on the agenda for the political union conference? When it comes to the economic and monetary union conference, we have not only the Government's agenda but an alternative draft treaty, whereas we know little of the Government's views or negotiating position in respect of the political union prospectus. When it comes to matters of major substance affecting the future of this country, the House of Commons and the people of this nation should have a right to participate, rather than everything being left to faceless officials meeting in Brussels.

Mr. Hurd: I recall a debate in which I set out our proposals and ideas very clearly. I will refresh the hon. Gentleman's mind by sending him the relevant copy of *Hansard*.

The Gulf

4. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries have now played an active role in the military operations taking place in the Gulf.

13. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of the United Nations are contributing financial or military aid to the allies in the Gulf war; and if he will list those countries which have not contributed.

Mr. Hurd: More than 30 nations, including nine European Community members, are contributing equipment, material and personnel to the multinational force in the Gulf. A number have been involved in military operations already, and others will become involved as the allied campaign takes its course. Most recently, the Governments of Germany, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have offered generous financial support to Britain.

Mr. Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for that detailed answer. Manfred Woerner, secretary-general of NATO, has called for a common defence and foreign policy within the EC. On 5 February, Mr. Jacques Poos said in *The Times* that if there had been a common foreign policy the result would have been speedier but the same. What is the point of speedier disunity? Does not taking NATO further into the EC risk uncoupling America's defence policy from the destiny of Europe?

Mr. Hurd: As I have just said, I believe that the bedrock of our defences must continue to be NATO. It is perfectly clear to me, however, that the Americans expect NATO's European members to play a larger part in the defence of Europe; and that expectation will have been increased by what has happened in the Gulf.

Mr. Galloway: On day two of the war, I described the aerial bombardment of cities as, by definition, mass murder. I was ridiculed by the Prime Minister and later by the Foreign Secretary.

As the Foreign Secretary watched the television screen at lunchtime and saw the charred ribbons of women and children swept out of the air raid shelter in Baghdad, did it occur to him that some of the blood of those innocent civilians was on his hands and the hands of those who are making this marvellous war against civilian targets in Baghdad and Basra? Will he stop bombing cities now?

Mr. Hurd: I have no information about the event that the hon. Gentleman has described, beyond what he and I watched on television. He will know—and, I hope, accept—that the greatest possible care is being taken to avoid indiscriminate attack on civilian targets and that the targeting is as precise as has ever been achieved in the history of modern warfare.

Let me tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that there is no doubt that war has its tragedies and those tragedies can sometimes be great, even when the greatest possible care and precision are exercised. That is why the responsibility lies so heavily on someone like Saddam Hussein who commits aggression and then refuses all peaceful invitations to reverse that aggression.

Sir Peter Blaker: Do not the allied forces in the Gulf deserve immense credit for the trouble that they are taking to minimise civilian casualties, sometimes at risk to their own lives? Is it not quite possible that the casualties among Iraqi civilians caused by allied bombing are fewer than those caused by Saddam Hussein's terror squads?

Mr. Hurd: That may well be so. The allied forces do all that they can to avoid civilian casualties; in that regard they are very different from President Saddam Hussein, whose Scud missiles are aimed indiscriminately at civilians, whether in Tel Aviv or in Riyadh.

Mr. Winnick: Everyone must deplore the number of civilian casualties and I hope that what has happened causes great and genuine concern to every hon. Member. The allied military command should bear in mind both the human and the political costs of the raids and the casualties.

Should we not also bear in mind, however, the atrocities that have been carried out in Kuwait since the invasion—the way in which so many people there have been terrorised and killed, and continue to be so? I have already said that I deplore the civilian casualties, but did not hundreds of thousands of Iraqis die in the useless, futile war waged by Saddam Hussein against Iran?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman puts his points well. I refer his hon. Friends who think otherwise to the Amnesty report on what has happened and is still happening in Kuwait.

Mr. Churchill: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is great concern at the fact that the suffering and plight of the civilian population of Kuwait go unreported because the dictator of Baghdad does not permit them to be reported, while the western media are making themselves the vehicle for Saddam Hussein's propaganda machine by playing up every civilian casualty? Very often, those casaulties may be caused by Iraqi surface-to-air missiles and they may often involve not civilian but military casualties.

Mr. Hurd: It is very important that all those reporting on these matters do not lose sight of, and continue to search for, evidence of what is happening in Kuwait. When I was talking to the Kuwaitis in Taif a few days ago, I urged them to do everything that they could to make that material available. We are doing our best in that respect.

Mr. Kaufman: I wish to express the dismay and horror of everyone in the House—certainly all Opposition Members—at the terrible event which took place in Baghdad this morning. I should be grateful if the Foreign Secretary could confirm that the air raid shelter in which those people died was not deliberately targeted. I should be grateful if he would ensure that the utmost efforts are made by the coalition forces to prevent the repetition of such a tragic mistake and that the avoidance of civilian casualties is given an even higher priority than it has been already. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the most effective way to avoid further appalling loss of innocent life is for Saddam Hussein to accept the United Nations resolutions, withdraw from Kuwait and end the war?

Mr. Hurd: The aim of all the allied forces in action now is to weaken the military machine which is perpetuating the aggression in Kuwait and thus bring nearer the time when Kuwait can be liberated as the United Nations has asked. Therefore, it is part of the policy of all the allied forces to keep to a minimum the civilian casualties which may occur as military targets are attacked. I agree entirely with the right hon. Gentleman's last point.

Soviet Union

5. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Soviet Foreign Minister to discuss human rights in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend last discussed human rights with the Soviet Foreign Minister during his visit to Moscow in September 1990.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the continued enslavement of the Baltic states and the refusal of exit visas to a number of refuseniks is intolerable? Will he remind the Russian authorities that we judge them not by Mr. Gorbachev's speeches but by his deeds and that some of his recent actions are offensive to all decent-minded men and women?

Mr. Hogg: On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, we believe that the peoples of the three Baltic republics have a right to self-determination and we hope that they and the Soviet Union will be able to negotiate the outcome that is wished by the people of those republics. On the second part of my hon. Friend's question, I agree entirely that the unfettered right to emigrate is one of the characteristics of an open and accountable society. There have been substantial improvements in that regard within the Soviet Union, but there is still further to go.

Mr. Rowlands: Before the Secretary of State meets his opposite number in Moscow about human rights issues, will he make immediate inquiries of President Gorbachev as to whether the latter supports the views of his own Prime Minister that somehow there was an absurd plot to destabilise the rouble in recent weeks?

Mr. Hogg: That allegation by the Soviet Prime Minister was manifestly dotty, and Mr. Gorbachev is not dotty.

Mr. William Powell: In all the representations that my hon. and learned Friend and other members of the Government have made to the Soviet authorities about the disgraceful shootings in Vilnius and Riga in recent weeks, have the Government received any satisfactory explanation from the Soviet authorities as to why they took place; and will my hon. and learned Friend continue to stress to the Soviet authorities that it would be very difficult for the western powers to be accommodating to the economic needs of the Soviet Union until a satisfactory explanation is given?

Mr. Hogg: We have had a number of explanations from the Soviet authorities, some more persuasive than others. As for the second part of my hon. Friend's question, this is indeed extremely regrettable. The British Government, in concert with others, want to signal our disapproval and condemnation of what is happening by, for example, suspending the non-humanitarian aid element of the Rome declaration. So I support the latter part of my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister reconsider his letter to me about bringing up at the United Nations the repression and killing in the Baltic states? Will he, even now, acknowledge that it is not good enough to say, as he did in his letter, that he does not think

"the United Nations Security Council is likely to solve the issue."

Does not that show appalling double standards, given the Government's reliance on the United Nations for everything they say about the Gulf?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady does not fully comprehend the jurisdiction and competence of the Security Council. If we tried to raise this matter in the Security Council I am afraid that it would be frustrated by endless sterile procedural arguments. What we need to do and are doing is to take every other opportunity open to us—they are many—to make it plain to the Soviet Government not merely that we condemn what they have been doing in the Baltic republics but that they will have to pay a price in terms of lost co-operation with the west.

China

6. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom and the people's republic of China.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are working to achieve a full and constructive relationship with the People's Republic of China. The dialogue we are developing covers a wide range of issues, including human rights. We have a common commitment to the maintenance of the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the People's Republic has made a substantial contribution to the international peace process in the United Nations, particularly over events in the Gulf? In that context, what progress has been made in recent weeks in discussions between the People's Republic, the United Kingdom Government and the Government of Hong Kong about the development of the port and airport scheme—especially the airport at Chek Lap Kok?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am happy to confirm that the People's Republic of China has made a constructive contribution to Security Council debates on the crisis in the Gulf.

The Government of China agree on the need for the airport. Premier Li Peng spoke to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude)—then responsible for Foreign Office affairs on China—in July of last year and gave him that assurance. Experts are discussing the project on both sides and we hope that the Chinese will support it in due course.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware of the role that the British inter-parliamentary group is playing in building better relationships with the People's Republic of China, specifically in the areas of human rights and the rights of the people of Hong Kong? Will he acknowledge the role that the British IPU plays in this important matter?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am sure that the IPU has made its concern on human rights felt. We, too, express our concern about them on every possible occasion.

Mr. Sims: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is as much in the interests of China as of Hong Kong that the territory should continue to enjoy stability and prosperity, to which he referred, and confidence in its future? Does he agree that the remarks attributed to Deng Xiaoping about British tricks and about sending in troops to put down rebellion do not contribute to confidence?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I confirm that it is as much in the interests of the Chinese Government as of the Hong Kong Government that Hong Kong should prosper. My hon. Friend referred to a newspaper article quoting remarks by Deng Xiaoping. That statement was not an official one by the Chinese Government. The report to which my hon. Friend referred was of an earlier article in a Hong Kong magazine last month. It is not helpful to comment on speculation.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, with only two weeks to go to the deadline, fewer than 6,000 Hong Kong people have applied for the 50,000 available passports? Does not that shambles show that the Government would have been better occupied bringing full democracy to Hong Kong instead of having this flawed scheme? Does not the fact that Hong Kong people are still flooding to Canada, the United States and Australia show that the scheme is not anchoring people in the territory and that those people, like us, no longer have confidence in the United Kingdom Government?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would recall that Labour Members, perhaps including himself, suggested that this scheme would flood the United Kingdom with people from Hong Kong. Considerable interest has been shown in the scheme. A quarter of a million application forms have been distributed. Experience shows that there may be a rush of applications just before the deadline.

Collective Security

7. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what importance he attaches to the strengthening of collective security arrangements.

Mr. Hurd: NATO, including the presence of north American forces in Europe, remains the basis for our collective security. The alliance is adapting to the new circumstances in Europe and we have put forward proposals for strengthening the European pillar within the alliance by building up the Western European Union. The WEU has shown that it can play a useful role in co-ordinating European military activities outside Europe.

Mr. Conway: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he accept that defending Europe's interests as an entity must extend beyond physical boundaries to include its interests? If so, does he find less than edifying the response of some of our European and NATO allies to the crisis which we face in the Gulf, particularly nations such as Belgium which have been less than enthusiastic about the part that they could play in the conflict?

Mr. Hurd: This was not a NATO responsibility, except in terms of the threat perceived to Turkey, a NATO member. Efforts to achieve a concerted military response have had patchy results. The Belgians have sent three warships and we are discussing further forms of help with them.

Ms. Short: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that the United Nations plays a part in collective security. Has he heard the suggestions in Germany that in future the Germans cannot be expected to pay without a say and that they should have some kind of representation in the United Nations, perhaps collective European representation, or, as Willie Brandt suggested, two alternating seats for Europe? Does the right hon. Gentleman have a statement to make about those two suggestions?

Mr. Hurd: I am glad that the hon. Lady recognises the United Nations role in enforcing collective security. I hope that she will now back resolution 678——

Ms. Short: I do.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Hurd: I withdraw that insinuation. I am glad that the hon. Lady shares my view of the importance of the United Nations to collective security. I hope that the German Government will persist in their plan to amend the German constitution, to enable Germany, with her allies and partners, to play a full part in collective security. Germany has not asked for a permanent seat on the Security Council and there is no such proposal on the table.

Ms. Short: On a point of order. The Foreign Secretary misrepresented me——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are frequently dissatisfied with the answers that they receive. I heard the Foreign Secretary withdraw that comment.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: May I commend my right hon. Friend for his wise remarks at Blaby on future collective security in the Gulf? Is not it essential that the Gulf states themselves decide what they want, and with whom they co-operate? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while the United Kingdom is prepared to play its part in underpinning peace in the region, there is no question of our having a large military presence east of Suez once again?

Mr. Hurd: May I say, first, that I withdrew my suggestion about the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) as soon as she began to show

indignation. Indeed, I withdrew it even before I had completed it. I am delighted that, with regard to the Gulf war, we are on the same side.

I agree with the point that my hon. Friend has just made. It is very important that the countries of the region, particularly the Arab members of the coalition against Saddam Hussein's aggression, should begin to form their own ideas about security, especially in the Gulf, after the war. I am very glad that, tomorrow, eight of the states most closely concerned will meet in Cairo to make a start.

The Gulf

8. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Arab League states about further exploration of diplomatic solutions to the Gulf crisis.

11. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had dicussions with any of his counterparts who are members of the union of Arab Maghreb nations, since the commencement of military action against Iraq.

Mr. Hurd: Discussions with members of the Union of Maghreb Nations and of the Arab League continue. We all agree on the need to end the conflict as early as possible, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. But a diplomatic solution can be possible only once Saddam Hussein is willing to comply with the Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Sillars: Does the Secretary of State agree that, although Saddam Hussein bears the primary responsibility for the conflict in the Gulf, the events in Baghdad this morning, involving very substantial loss of human life, not only constitute a human tragedy but represent a political disaster for the coalition forces and, in particular, for those Arab leaders associated with the coalition, against the wishes of the mass of people in their countries? Does not this point to the need to rule in compromise as a possible solution before the land battle commences and further civilian casualties of the magnitude experienced today occur? Has the Secretary of State talked to the Kuwaiti Government and received from them any suggestion that they might agree with the United States ambassador to Baghdad that Saddam Hussein could perhaps retreat to the two islands and the oilfield and hold them as a compromise solution until international——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is far too long for a supplementary question.

Mr. Hurd: I had discussions with the Kuwaiti Government four days ago, but I should not have thought it right, or in any way fruitful—their whole country having been invaded and virtually obliterated, and their people tortured and oppressed—to suggest to them that they should take the initiative or should accept from anybody else any initiative involving the dismembering of their country.

Mr. Strang: What effect does the Secretary of State think the bombing of the air raid shelter today has had on the opinion of these nations and their leaders? Is it not clear that there is growing revulsion, not only among the Arab nations but throughout the world, at what is happening in Iraq? Surely the Secretary of State must accept that thousands and thousands of Iraqi civilians have now been killed.

Mr. Hurd: In Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and in discussions here with Syria's Foreign Minister, I have heard that in those three key Arab countries, which are members of the coalition against Saddam Hussein, the issue of civilian casualties has been considered fairly and accepted—accepted in the sense that those countries realise the nature of the operation, agree with its objective and intend to stay within the coalition. I do not believe that even tragedies of the kind reported this morning will alter that analysis or shake that determination.

Sir Richard Luce: Is it not more constructive that my right hon. Friend has made it absolutely plain that the British Government stand ready, once Kuwait has been liberated, to respond to any request from middle east countries to play a prominent role in the economic and political reconstruction of the middle east?

Mr. Hurd: Indeed, and it is because the Kuwaitis have begun to plan in detail the reconstruction of their country that a group of British business men came with me to talk to the Kuwaitis four days ago. I am glad that they did that. We have made two things clear—first, that it is not for us to impose a political, strategic or economic blueprint on the region. The good ideas have to come from the region itself and that is beginning to happen. Secondly, as my right hon. Friend says, we have made it clear that we are willing, within our means, to consider any suggestions for help from those countries once they have sorted out their own ideas.

Sir Michael Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that in pursuing a diplomatic solution that will see the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait, one of the key players at the present time is Iran? Will he take this opportunity to characterise the state of the dialogue with that country? Does he also accept that the continuing parliamentary links with Iran suggest that there is a much more favourable climate now in which to make progress?

Mr. Hurd: We restored diplomatic relations with Iran in the autumn, as my hon. Friend is aware. I am in favour of the kind of parliamentary contacts to which he referred and I hope that they will bear fruit before long. The progress of our relations has not been as fast as I would have wished. I am very anxious to make progress on some of the bilateral points, which is diplomatic jargon for the British hostages held by pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon and also Mr. Cooper who is in prison in Tehran.

Mr. Ernie Ross: When the Foreign Secretary next meets the Arab League states, as part of his attempt to find a diplomatic solution, will he assure them of his determination to strengthen the new Lebanese Government? As part of that determination, will he raise with the Israeli Government the need for them to stop their land, sea and air incursions into Lebanon? Will he also raise with them the need to help strengthen that Lebanese Government?

Mr. Hurd: I welcome the move of the Lebanese Government into the south of their own country, but that is a slightly different point. Palestinian groups have been using force and rockets against settlements in the north of

Israel. While I accept the need for the whole tragedy of Lebanon to be discussed, the Palestinian part in the latest violent episodes cannot be brushed aside.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will my right hon. Friend contrasts the immediate comments of certain Opposition Members about the tragedy—and I stress the word "tragedy"—of the civilian loss of life about which we have heard today, with the absolute silence that greeted the destruction of thousands of homes in the state of Israel as the result of Scud attacks?

Mr. Hurd: To be fair, the whole House has shown its revulsion against the indicriminate attacks made by the Iraqi Scud missiles whether against Israel or civilians in Riyadh. The sooner this whole crisis can be brought to an end by reversing the aggression and freeing Kuwait, the sooner we can get on with the task of trying to rebuild a more sensible middle east in which these tragedies do not occur.

Mr. Kaufman: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for repudiating the offensive and foolish remark made by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo). Does the Foreign Secretary agree that as Scud missiles continue to rain on Israel causing civilian casualties and destroying people's homes, the need for Israeli security through a peace settlement becomes more obvious, because it is clear that the occupation of the occupied territories does not provide Israel with that security, as Amos Oz so widely said in that superb interview that he gave on television on Sunday afternoon? Will he remind Mr. Shamir that a settlement is not possible unless he is ready to speak to representative Palestinians and that it is deplorable that he places in prison moderate Palestinians like Sari Nusseibeh?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and the right hon. Gentleman are differing in their reactions to the attacks on Israel or in their support for the restraint that the Israel Government have shown in response. However, the right hon. Gentleman's second point is soundly based, because after the war we will have to return to the search for a lasting settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute. That cannot be done simply by agreements between Israel and Syria on the one hand and Saudi Arabia and other Arab states on the other. It must include what is called the Palestinian question. It must be based on the United Nations Security Council resolution which defines as necessary the ending of the occupation by Israel of the occupied territories and the recognition and the securing of Israel's security behind safe borders.

Prisoners of War

9. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Iraqi ambassador to make representations concerning the treatment of British and allied prisoners of war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I summoned the Iraqi ambassador on 21 January to protest about Iraqi threats to use allied prisoners of war as human shields. I summoned him again on 29 January, following Iraqi news reports that prisoners of war had been wounded and that one perhaps had been killed. I told the ambassador that the Iraqi Government were in breach of their international obligations under articles 19 and 23 of the third Geneva convention. I asked him to convey our views to the Iraqi Government at once and at the highest level.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Was his meeting with the ambassador held in the Tower of London? If not, why not? When the ambassador returns to this country, will my hon. and learned Friend have further meetings with him in the Tower of London so that the ambassador can be close to the torture chamber and make himself familiar with what Saddam Hussein has done to prisoners of war and, in particular, our loved ones?

Mr. Hogg: When I saw the ambassador I made it plain to him that we regarded the conduct of his Government as wholly disgraceful. After that meeting he was under no illusion whatsoever.

Mr. Rees: Does the Minister recall that during the previous war, when it was reported to the House that RAF air crew had been badly treated and, indeed, shot, a promise was made to do something about it after the war? After the war, it was decided conveniently to forget it. I hope that the Minister's words—a correct condemnation—will not be the end of the matter. It must never be forgotten that, when prisoners of war on any side are badly treated, somebody must be brought to justice.

Mr. Hogg: I made it plain to the ambassador that where there was a gross breach of international obligations, those responsible could be held personally liable.

Mr. Onslow: What are the penalties for a reckless breach of the Geneva convention in these matters, and who is responsible for enforcing them?

Mr. Hogg: There are a variety of ways in which individuals can be made accountable for their individual action. Of course, the consequences depend upon the precise nature of the breach alleged.

Afghanistan

10. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations with Afghanistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We do not have substantive dealings with the Najibullah regime, which is not supported by the majority of Afghans. We would welcome its replacement by a Government truly acceptable to the Afghan people with whom normal relations would be possible.

Mr. Brown: If the British Government are so chummy with Syria and Iran, for example, what is wrong with Afghanistan? To my knowledge, Dr. Najib's Government are not associated with terrorism—certainly, they are a revolutionary Government—but I wonder why there is not one British representative in Kabul. Could it just be that the Tory Government can never forget that the Afghan trade union movement backed the miners during the struggle—*[Interruption.]* That is true. The Afghan trade union movement backed the miners against the Thatcher regime. We can never forget that.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No, it has nothing to do with the miners. We have not broken off diplomatic relations with Afghanistan but the Najibullah regime is only there with

the support of the Soviet Union. It remains unrepresentative and unacceptable to a majority of the Afghans and controls only some 20 per cent. of the territory.

Mr. Atkinson: Can my hon. Friend confirm that a contingent of the Afghan mujaheddin is currently serving in Saudi Arabia? Is not that a welcome development? Can he say what their role is?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I can confirm that a contingent of the Afghan mujaheddin is serving in Saudi Arabia.

Yugoslavia

12. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the ambassador of Yugoslavia to discuss that country's relationship with European institutions.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): The Yugoslav ambassador last paid a formal call on my right hon. Friend in November 1989. On 30 January 1991 he called on my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg).

Mr. Wareing: Although our minds are rightly concentrated on the Gulf, does the Minister agree that the possible break-up of Yugoslavia creates potential danger to peace in south-east Europe and that the nationalist tensions within that country could give rise to problems for Yugoslavia's neighbours? Is it not therefore in our interest to support the Yugoslav federation's application for membership of the Council of Europe and for a new association treaty with the European Community?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that Yugoslavia already is a guest member of the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly. Yugoslavia has applied for full membership of the Council of Europe. That has been passed in the usual way to the parliamentary assembly. We now await the opinion of the assembly on the matter. No doubt it will bear in mind the points that the hon. Gentleman has just made.

Mr. Aitken: Does my hon. Friend agree that Yugoslavia seems to be perilously close to civil war? Can he assure the House that he will do everything in his power, both through our diplomatic channels and through European institutions, to persuade the leaders of Croatia and Serbia to turn back from their tragic collision course towards bloodshed?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The United Kingdom is obliged under the CSCE Final Act to continue to support the unity and integrity of Yugoslavia and also the right of individual peoples to national self-determination. We would deplore the use or the threat of force against any democratically elected Government.

The Gulf

14. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been his Department's responsibilities and activities in connection with the international response to environmental damage caused since the commencement of hostilities in the Gulf; and what consultations he has had with other Governments on the subject.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is maintaining close touch through diplomatic channels with the Gulf states affected, who are leading the response to the environmental damage that Iraq is inflicting on the region. The FCO was pleased to be able to assist in making the arrangements for, and a financial contribution to, the visit of the RSPCA team to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister accept that there was widespread concern that at the time of the oil slick—caused, I accept, by the Iraqis and not in other ways—there had not been adequate preparation, given the many warnings of environmental risk to the Gulf as a result of hostilities? In view of the greater danger to human life and to the environment if the chemical cocktail of toxic substances in Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia were to be detonated or released by future conflict, what is being done now to ensure that the allied forces avoid such detonation, and what preventive measures are planned to mitigate any further much worse environmental damage to humans and to the middle east in general?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The response to the emergency caused by the oil slick is clearly the responsibility of Saudi Arabia and the other sovereign Gulf states affected. However, I can confirm that a considerable amount of equipment—90 tonnes of anti-pollution equipment—from stocks held in Britain has been delivered to the region.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that loss of human life is the worst form of environmental damage? Is it true that the Iraqis are setting up concentration camps in Kuwait for Kuwaiti civilians? Will he give an undertaking that, when the war is over, those responsible will be prosecuted under international law?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My hon. Friend has raised a point that is not relevant to the environmental damage, but I can confirm that the worst possible environmental damage caused by Saddam Hussein involves the appalling atrocities that he has committed against people in Kuwait and that region.

B52 Bombers (Bristol Channel)

3.30 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement about the announcement that B52s would dump bombs in the Bristol channel in an emergency.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) for raising this issue, and hope that I can allay his concern and that of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The House will recall that we agreed last month that the United States could operate B52s from RAF Fairford as part of an allied effort in the Gulf conflict. The United States air force requested that an area should be provided for jettisoning bombs in the very unlikely event of an emergency occurring shortly after take-off.

Notices to airmen were issued on 8 and 9 February and to mariners on 12 February advising them of the establishment of an emergency jettison area for B52 aircraft off Hartland point, seaward of the Bristol channel. Thousands of notices to airmen are issued every year, covering a variety of planned and possible events. The emergency area selected is a permanently designated military danger area, covering 1,000 square miles, normally active during daylight hours from Monday to Friday, which is notified to all airmen and mariners. It covers an air gunnery range used daily by the RAF for activities including live firing. The purpose in issuing the recent notices to airmen and mariners was to activate the area full time. That would not prohibit the use of the area by shipping.

The likelihood of the area being used by B52s in emergency is extremely remote. In such an event the bombs being jettisoned would not be armed, and the B52 aircrew would use all means available—including visual checks and radar—to ensure that the area below them was clear of aircraft and shipping. In addition, as much notice as possible of any emergency would be given to all shipping through the normal international frequencies.

The issue of the notices to airmen and mariners is therefore a sensible precaution, designed to deal with a very remote contingency in the safest way possible.

Mr. Speller: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and explanation, and propose to ask him four specific questions.

First, presumably by definition the aircraft will be in some distress, otherwise an emergency would not arise. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the bombs will not be armed, whether the planes are going to, or coming back from, the Gulf? Is my hon. Friend aware that the coastguard at Ilfracombe was not aware of the points that he has made today and the fishermen and those involved in coastal shipping ask how they are supposed to get out of the way if large chunks descend on them—*[Laughter.]* My constituents do not find this matter nearly as funny as hon. Members. How are fishermen supposed to be notified to get out of the way should a problem arise if they do not have a radio?

Mr. Hamilton: An aircraft is much more likely to be in distress shortly after take-off than when returning, when it is very unlikely. If that were the case, one would expect the aircraft to jettison bombs much further out to sea. I emphasise what I said in my opening remarks: we would rely on the B52s to use radar to make absolutely certain that no shipping was below them. I am told that that is reliable. They would not be flying at great altitudes and the radar would work effectively. In those circumstances, the danger to shipping below them would be minimal.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does the Minister accept that we all recognise that this is a remote possibility and that it is better that there are contingency plans than that there are not? Does he further recognise that the designated area is nearly 100 miles from the point of take-off of the aircraft, that along the flight path on either side of the channel live 1·5 million people, and that the aircraft weighs 220 tonnes and carries 30 tonnes of munitions? Will the Minister confirm that, in the event of an aircraft having to jettison its bombs, 108 500 lb bombs, which normally fall in a pattern one mile long and half a mile wide, would fall? What reassurance can he give the constituents of the many hon. Members who represent areas on both sides of the channel who are concerned about an aircraft which may be in trouble and even unable to reach the designated area?

Mr. Hamilton: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that this is a remote possibility, as of course it is. We are drawing up a contingency measure for a remote possibility. I remind him that the bombs are not armed, so there is no question of them exploding. I cannot comment on the amount of armament that the B52 carries, but, as I have already emphasised, every precaution will be taken to ensure that there is no damage to the area.

Sir Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): Has my hon. Friend published any guidelines, and, if not, does he intend to do so, on damage which may be done to fishing tackle that could be hit by an undetonated bomb? Does he accept that, although many of my constituents recognise that it is an outside possibility that that would ever happen, there is anxiety? Will he make sure that there is clear guidance about a hotline to the Ministry of Defence, possibly via the local authority, to deal with any queries or anxieties that arise?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, I am more than happy that we should answer any questions that arise. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend could give the number of my private office to anybody who wishes to ring, and we shall certainly deal with any question that may cause concern. It is important that we get this into perspective. We are talking about an outside possibility of an aircraft which has taken off from RAF Fairford being in trouble. That possibility is extremely remote. If any question of damage to fishing vessels or to nets or fishing gear arises, I remind my hon. Friend that we have always paid compensation in the past, and I am sure that we would do so in future.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Does the Minister accept that his explanation to the House is simply not good enough? Whether or not this is an outside chance, communities along the Bristol channel and shipping in it are in danger. Will he tell the House what measures he intends to take to ensure that coastguards are notified so that shipping is cleared from the area and, at all costs, that bombs are dropped not over the Bristol channel but only in the designated areas?

Mr. Hamilton: I do not understand what the hon. Lady is on about. By prescribing this designated area we are ensuring that any bombs will be dropped in that area. That is precisely what we are doing in this whole procedure. If we did not have a designated area, clearly the aircraft would drop the bombs wherever it was convenient to them and we would have no control whatever. It is part of the procedure to alert coastguards, and everything would be done in the time available to alert people in the area to what was happening. Messages would be put out on the radio into which fishermen are tuned.

Mr. Nicholas Ridley (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): As the Member in whose constituency is Fairford, may I thank my hon. Friend for arranging for me to visit the splendid airmen and their aircraft? May I say how appreciative the majority of the population are that the Americans have stationed their forces here in order to protect our troops who are at risk in the Gulf by bombing Iraqi military targets?

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is right to say that the B52s are playing a critical role. It is a mark of the responsibility of the United States air force that it has asked us to make contingency plans to cover a very remote possibility.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Have the arrangements that the Minister has just described ever been made in any circumstances before?

Mr. Hamilton: We have issued a number of other notifications, to both mariners and airmen. As I said, we issue thousands of them every year covering a whole mass of different contingencies and warnings to people in various areas. There has been a large number of other notifications, but I doubt whether there have been any for armed B52s.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I appreciate that what my hon. Friend has described is absolutely necessary in the circumstances. I am sure that it comes as no surprise that such arrangements should be made at this time. Can my hon. Friend tell me the exact location of the designated area, and also its proximity to the capital city of Wales and the south Wales coast?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes. The centre of the danger area is some 20 miles off Hartland point. The boundary of the area lies not closer than five miles to Hartland point, and it extends for some 30 miles from the Devon coast. The area is fan shaped, rotating from north of Hartland point towards the south-west.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What consultation was there prior to the Minister's announcement with fishing and environmental interests along the Bristol channel? Will he carefully explain to the House what precise arrangements for consultation with shipping and with civilian populations on both sides of the Bristol channel would take place in an emergency?

Mr. Hamilton: Obviously, in an emergency, we would have very little time to consult anybody. On the question of consultation with the fishing industry, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it is very well aware of that area, and has been for a long time. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my opening remarks, he would have heard me say that the area is constantly used for live firing. All that we are doing is making it a 24-hour danger area. The notification is in addition to what already happens.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Can my hon. Friend confirm that the B52s are flying in support of our troops and other allied troops who are trying to enforce United Nations resolutions? Is he aware that the people of Bristol would prefer B52s to drop their bombs in extremis in the Bristol channel rather than that, in years to come, Saddam Hussein should drop a nuclear bomb in Bristol?

Mr. Hamilton: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The B52s are playing a very valuable role in the Gulf conflict. It is nothing other than responsible and sensible for the USAF to make such contingency provision against the outside possibility that something might go wrong.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The Opposition welcome the Government's response. There has been a great deal of disquiet about the lack of information, and I am not sure whether the Minister's statement will allay that disquiet. Will he assure us that the decision will be constantly under review?

Mr. Hamilton: It is not a decision that should be under review because it is a sensible precaution against the outside possibility of something going wrong. The time for review will be when the B52s cease to operate out of RAF Fairford—when, presumably, the conflict will be over and therefore the contingency arrangement will no longer be necessary.

Points of Order

3.44 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you would advise Government Departments that, when they group one question with another, they should advise the hon. Members concerned that they intend to do so. I was not advised until a quarter to three this afternoon that my question No. 13 would be grouped with question No. 4. Will you say something about that practice, Mr. Speaker?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). A letter was put on the notice board, I understand at about 11 o'clock this morning. I am sorry that my hon. Friend did not receive it. It may have been the fault of my officials. I shall contemplate how we can improve communications because I well understand that it puts my hon. Friend and other hon. Members in an embarrassing position, and I would not want that to happen again.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not expect that you saw "Newsnight" last night, but I know that many people throughout the nation share with the people of Northern Ireland their concern about the shameful treatment of members of the armed forces and the UDR. Will the Attorney-General be making a statement in the House tomorrow about an appeal?

Mr. Speaker: I did not have an opportunity to watch that programme, but I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman says will have been heard on the Front Bench.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Questions that were allegedly tabled for answer on 26 February were in fact tabled for answer on 25 February.

Mr. Speaker: I shall look into that.

National Audit Office (Extension of Powers)

3.45 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to extend the powers of the National Audit Office so as to permit the Office, on an application by a national political party, to cost that party's election commitments.

Last year my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) introduced a similar Bill. It was, rather curiously, spoken against but not opposed by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). However, he did us a service in that he reminded the House that the Opposition do not have available to them the advice necessary properly to cost their policies? I have listened to that plea, and that is why I am sure today that the Opposition will welcome the help that I am trying to bring to them through the Bill. Let me make it clear that the Bill is intended to help the Labour party.

The National Audit Office is described as Parliament's financial watchdog. It has an acknowledged political role and is not supposed to be impartial. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has said:

"To say that the NAO . . . should not get involved in politics is like saying the Church should not get involved in politics."

If the NAO is to be the parliamentary watchdog, why should we restrict its work to the Government's policies. I want it to be a full watchdog and to scrutinise the Opposition's policies as well. If it found that some Labour policies were unaffordable, ill thought out, out of date or just plain daft, I am sure that the Labour party would be grateful. But if it could not bring itself to be grateful, I am sure that the electorate would be.

The NAO might care to examine the proposed payroll tax that would cost so many jobs. It might seek to examine renationalisation plans, the harmful effects of a national minimum wage or the repeal of trade union legislation which would bring back intimidation, secondary strikes and flying pickets. But the main question that the NAO should consider is the cost of Labour's programme.

I recognise that it is difficult to estimate the cost of Labour's programme. The Labour party has been not so much coy on the subject as mute. It may be that this afternoon the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) will turn Queen's evidence and tell us the cost of Labour's programme; or he may be waiting for this Bill to give him the help he needs in order to cost Labour's programme so that he can then tell the House and the country how much it will cost.

What evidence do we have about what a Labour Government would cost? The document "Looking to the Future" has 81 uncosted spending pledges. UBS Phillips and Drew calculate the cost of that to be £19·5 billion, including the promises made in "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change". Professors Patrick Minford and Paul Ashton of Liverpool university, whom the Labour party might not think are the most unbiased assessors of its policies, calculate a similar price of £21·5 billion. Midland Montagu has gone for the jackpot. It says that Labour's policies would cost a maximum of £50 billion.

The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has being trying to restrain Labour party spokesmen, but she has been failing of late, and the promises keep on rolling.

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

The last Labour party conference made spending commitments totalling £36·46 billion. I recall three further pledges that I heard made in this Chamber. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) referred to no-fault compensation as

"an idea whose time has come."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1991; Vol. 184, c. 1274.]

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said:

"We will increase the science budget."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1991; Vol. 185, c.346.]

When asked whether extra spending on training would be a priority, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said:

"The answer is obviously yes."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. 295.]

Those three commitments were made in the space of one week, so how much more would Labour spend if it were given a few months?

One can add to such statements the off-the-cuff comments made to encourage Labour supporters, and the fact that no Labour Member of Parliament makes a speech without promising a massive council house building programme, a large increase in school budgets, or a substantial improvement in housing revenue support. One recalls that, last year, Labour described £3 billion of revenue support as peanuts. You name it, Mr. Speaker, and Labour has promised to spend more of the taxpayers' money on it.

The worst feature is that Labour promises to fund its programme without raising the general level of taxation. Regardless of whose costings one takes, Labour's programme would sting every family and every wage earner, young and old alike. If the National Audit Office could find a way of funding such expenditure without increasing the basic rate of taxation, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would like to know about it.

I would like to come clean, because it might be that I am being unfair to Labour, and that its calls for higher public expenditure are just hot air designed to win votes. I will quote from an article that I found in a photocopier:

"Far from getting something out of the next Labour Government, it looks as though we can expect cuts . . . All previous Labour Governments . . . introduced some reforms. Very soon afterwards, they started to attack those reforms —starving them of money, introducing cuts in the social services generally, and imposing wage restraint."

Those are not the minutes of the supper club, but come from an article in the *Morning Star* of 29 January. At least it knows what to expect from a Labour Government.

Either Labour's programme is a complete work of fiction, or by order a Labour Government would abolish the rules of arithmetic, or every family would pay a high price for Labour's rag-bag of dusted-off 1960s policies, topped up with Mussolini-style statism, and repackaged as being electorate-friendly and cheap to operate.

I know that Labour will welcome my Bill, and will look forward to the National Audit Office's recommendations. I am certain that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and the hon. Member for Derby, South will help me in drawing up the Bill's details. I look forward to working with them on a Bill that will do so much to help Labour and the electorate.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, and Mr. Ian Taylor.

National Audit Office (Extension of Powers)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes accordingly presented a Bill to extend the powers of the National Audit Office so as to permit the office, on an application by a national political party, to cost that party's election commitments: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 5 July and to be printed. [Bill 86.]

Autumn Statement

[Relevant documents: Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement (Cm 1311) and the Statistical Supplement thereto (Cm 1520).

First Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1990-91 on the 1990 Autumn Statement (House of Commons Paper No. 41) and its First Special Report containing the Government's response (House of Commons Paper No. 212).]

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Because of the pressure to speak in the debate, I shall put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock. I hope that those hon. Members who are called before and after that time will also bear in mind the 10-minute limit.

3.54 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8th November 1990; commends the Government on its determination to maintain downward pressure on inflation and to build on the great improvements in economic performance over the last eleven years; and welcomes the Government's continued tight control of public expenditure coupled with improved value for money and its provision of additional resources for key areas.

We are debating the autumn statement rather later this year than usual, chiefly because the Government wished to allow the new statistical supplement to the statement to be available to the House before the debate.

The House will understand that I cannot anticipate the Budget statement that I shall be making on 19 March. While this may restrict my remarks on the economy today, I am obviously keen to address the concerns that I know right hon. and hon. Members have.

We are aided in our debate today by a wide-ranging and thorough report on the autumn statement from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his skill in chairing the Committee.

The Government have responded to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations, and I am grateful to the Committee for publishing that response speedily, so that it is available to hon. Members this afternoon.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister presented his autumn statement to the House as Chancellor on 8 November last year. As a result of subsequent events, I found myself in the unusual—perhaps unique—position, less than four weeks later, of giving evidence to the Select Committee on the economy, as Chancellor, and on the outcome of the public expenditure round which I had conducted as Chief Secretary.

I want to say a little about public spending plans, but I will start with the economy. While I appreciate that hon. Members, and the country, are concerned about the present recession, and the level of interest rates, I must stress at the outset that the reduction of inflation remains the overriding objective of Government policy. There can be no letting up on that goal. Low inflation is the essential basis for all our success in the future, which is why it is worth striving for.

Following the ravages of inflation in the 1970s, we made remarkable progress against it in the mid-1980s. For six years in a row, United Kingdom inflation was below the EC average—including 1986 when it fell as low as 3·4 per cent. The low inflation of those years was not merely valuable in itself, but brought in its wake steady growth, high productivity and strong profitability, which saw British business climb from the bottom towards the top of the European league tables. I am determined that in the 1990s Britain should again enjoy those benefits which we had in the 1980s.

I am confident that we can get inflation down again. While the slowdown in the economy is painful, it has none the less improved the prospects for inflation and the current account. Many outside forecasters now expect us to beat the autumn statement forecast for headline inflation of 5·5 per cent. by the end of the year. Their optimism is borne out by the CBI's most recent industrial trends survey, which said that output price expectations for the coming months were the weakest in a January for five years.

There are some who say that inflation is already beaten and that we can let up in the battle against it, but of course, it is often during the downturn that the seeds for the next bout of inflation are sown. While there has been some encouraging news recently on inflation, Monday's producer price figures bring home the risks and the need for a continued firm policy.

There is indeed a price for getting low inflation, but experience has shown that it is a price well worth paying, and we should have the courage to stick with the policies which will, in time, deliver European levels of inflation again. Lower inflation will also make it easier to lower interest rates. I appreciate the anxiety for further progress on interest rates but, from the point of view of industry, what matters most is sustainable interest rate cuts rather than premature cuts which subsequently have to be reversed. We do not want to repeat what happened in 1981 when interest rates were cut sharply and then had to be reversed—a point that seems to have escaped the notice of some learned professors who write letters to *The Times*.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Is the Chancellor aware of the concern in the clothing and textile industry about the advice that economists are giving banks? The banks are being told to withdraw support from the industry because they are at risk. Will the right hon. Gentleman advise the banks to change their attitude to the industry? Otherwise, many companies will fall and many jobs will be lost. Will the Chancellor act to stop those firms going under?

Mr. Lamont: I am, of course, aware of the concern to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It is felt in a number of countries, but I think that it is felt more seriously in other countries than it is here. I do not think that we face the prospect of a credit crunch of the kind that is sometimes talked about in the United States. The Bank of England, however, monitors developments of the kind that the hon. Gentleman has in mind very carefully, and I shall take on board what he has said.

When the economy is in recession, it is always difficult to see where the upturn is coming from. Those who plan for the future often work on the assumption that the next six months will be just like the last; but we know that recession always come to an end, and that the present one

[Mr. Lamont]

will be no exception. Indeed, we can already begin to discern some of the forces that will lead to recovery. That is why the vast majority of independent forecasters are expecting a return to growth later this year.

It is important to remember that the recession comes after a sustained period of growth which has greatly strengthened companies and their finances. The current downturn follows a cumulative growth in output between 1981 and 1989 of 28 per cent. That is a lot of extra output to set against a fall currently predicted by some independent forecasters of around 1 per cent. or so. A reversal of that magnitude does not justify exaggerated and irresponsible talk of a depression; nor does the behaviour of the monetary aggregates. The growth of both broad and narrow money has fallen markedly in a way that is consistent with the reduction in inflation that we are expecting but does not suggest that the policy is excessively tight.

We are not alone. Three of the G7 countries are now in recession—the United States, Canada and ourselves. So are Australia and New Zealand. Although continental Europe is not in recession, it has not escaped the downturn. Industrial production has fallen in France, Italy, Belgium, Spain and Sweden—quite strongly in Sweden—within the past six months. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), when he talks about the recession and blames it all on the Government, will give us his reasons for the fact that output is also falling in those other countries.

The truth is that much of what is happening is cyclical. The United Kingdom began its recovery from the last recession in 1982-83—sooner than the other countries—and our subsequent growth was particularly strong. It is not surprising, therefore, that we should also be the first to enter the period of downswing.

Other countries are at different stages of the cycle. For example—although we did not hear much about it from Opposition Members—four years ago the British economy was growing strongly and the French economy much less so; the German economy, in growth terms at least, was in the doldrums. Now, Britain is experiencing recession and output growth has recently slowed in France, while the German economy, buoyed up by reunification, is still enjoying strong growth.

Just how deep and how long the recession will be is difficult to predict at any time, but the present outlook is made more uncertain by the Gulf war. The world and United Kingdom economies were slowing down before the Gulf crisis began, but Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last August, and the consequent rise in oil prices, boosted fuel costs and inflation and dented business confidence. Many firms have responded by postponing spending decisions.

The uncertainties created by the Gulf crisis have added particularly to the problems of certain sectors of the economy. Airlines and the travel, hotel and entertainment businesses have lost valuable trade as tourists and other travellers have cancelled flights. The extent of the problem was shown this week, when British Airways announced several thousand redundancies.

Again, we must keep a sense of perspective. Over the past few years this country has seen a rise in employment —an increase by the third quarter of 1990 of 3·75 milion since 1983—greater than in any other EC country, and for 44 months we saw unemployment falling sharply. That was a remarkable development, greeted in stony silence by the Opposition. Because unemployment is an indicator that lags behind changes in output, the first six months in which activity was weakening saw only a gradual rise in the numbers out of work. That trend has only begun to accelerate over the last quarter, and we can expect unemployment to continue to climb for some time even after the recovery in output has begun.

Although that recovery has not yet begun, experience shows that it will start when we have made and are seen to have made decisive progress against inflation. That is what happened in 1981, when our position was far more difficult than it is today. Then we had to cope with very high inflation—following the Opposition's disastrous policies in Government—and a sharp loss of competitiveness, partly due to the strength of sterling following the United Kingdom's emergence as a major oil producer. In recent months, the rise in inflation has been much less severe. Underlying inflation, at its peak in 1990, reached 8·4 per cent. compared with 20·7 per cent. in 1980.

A new problem that we have encountered this time round has been the adjustment of the economy to very high levels of private sector debt built up during the second half of the 1980s. Inevitably the strain is being felt by those individuals and companies who have taken on the highest levels of debt. For example, some service sector firms borrowed heavily in the 1980s and are therefore among those who have felt the effects of high interest rates most keenly.

The onset of recession started to make the headlines at about the time we joined the exchange rate mechanism and that has prompted many to blame the recession on our entry. But the ERM is not the source of the current recession: it is not a Pandora's box from which the downturn sprang. The downturn in the economy is the inevitable result of exessive demand and borrowing in 1987 and 1988, which it was necessary to curb. A period of weaker activity became essential to reduce inflationary pressures. If there was any mistake, it was that policy was not tight enough and that was far from the course urged upon us by the Opposition.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Who opened the Pandora's box? Was it not the right hon. Gentleman's ministerial colleague, in the team of which he was a member, when he simultaneously presided over the liberalisation of credit and tax cuts and changes in mortgage interest relief?

Mr. Lamont: I am sorry to hear that the hon. Gentleman has been against the liberalisation of the financial system. I believe that, in a modern society, people should have choices about how much they borrow. Although it has brought problems in economic management, it has also brought immense benefit to millions of people, and the deregulation of the financial sector has also created many hundreds of thousands of jobs and boosted international competitiveness.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Did the laxness of policy in 1987 and 1988 have anything to do with shadowing the deutschmark? If so, how does that differ in principle from being in the ERM?

Mr. Lamont: I do not believe that the relatively short period in which we shadowed the deutschmark was the

cause of the subsequent inflation. We all know that the growth of demand in 1987 was distorted after the stock market crash, but it is also a fact that people and firms borrowed and made their decisions to borrow on a scale never before seen in this country or in the United States. The Opposition seem to imply that we should have had higher interest rates—a course that they have never urged on us.

It also requires a feat of memory to recall that only last summer some Opposition Front Bench spokesmen were claiming that, because retail sales were still buoyant, our policies were not working. Some others even suggested that the Budget last year was not tight enough. It is true that the effects of our tight policies have taken longer to work through than many people expected, but ERM entry alone can take neither the blame nor the credit for that —depending on one's point of view.

The ERM and Britain's position in it are central to the Government's overall strategy. The Government, under my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), took a firm decision last October to join the mechanism and abide by its rules. That decision has been made. We made a commitment then and we will stick to it.

We joined the ERM because it had a good track record of helping to close the inflation gap between its members. We accept the discipline that membership requires. The overriding factor in setting interest rates now is the need to meet our obligations and to keep sterling inside its agreed bands. Our reward will be that, over time, the United Kingdom's inflation rate will converge on the best inflation performance in the ERM.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East claims that his party would adhere to the rules of the ERM. On BBC's "Newsnight" on 9 January, he said:

"we strongly believe that Britain should be in the ERM and we are willing to accept the disciplines that involves".

Those words appear crystal clear. The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to accept that we must set interest rates at a level which will keep the pound within its ERM bands: what else could he mean by "disciplines"? Yet when the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues speak about interest rates in this House, they seem to do so without any regard for our obligations as members of the ERM.

There clearly is some ambiguity in the stance of the Opposition, but our position is clear. It would be irresponsible and misguided to think that interest rates could be cut regardless of sterling's position in the ERM or regardless of the disposition of the other currencies in the mechanism. It would be intolerable if the consequence of lower interest rates was a move outside our ERM band. That is and must remain the primary consideration.

Today's interest rate reduction—and future reductions when the time for them comes—can be made only when sterling's position in the ERM permits—that is, when we judge the reduction to be sustainable and safe. It would be wrong, however, to imagine that we are locked into high interest rates indefinitely. We have flexibility within the band, and it has been the experience of other ERM countries that interest rate differentials have narrowed along with inflation differentials—not necessarily immediately or rapidly, but that can happen. That means that our interest rates will eventually fall to reflect our progress in the fight against inflation—although when the further falls in interest rates will occur, I cannot say.

We joined the ERM at a central rate of DM2·95. That is a rate at which British industry can compete in Europe. It is close to the average over the past 25 years. Indeed, if anything, our real exchange rate is relatively low by comparison with the 1980s, a decade during much of which the United Kingdom held its share of world trade in manufactures and recorded stronger export growth than a number of its European competitors. Because of falling inflation in the United Kingdom, I expect any loss of competitiveness in the months ahead to be limited.

Sterling's rate against the dollar may be high, but, as the CBI has pointed out, that reflects the current weakness of the dollar against all the major currencies. A high exchange rate against the dollar is causing pain for all countries throughout Europe which sell to the United States.

Of course, when the economy encounters difficulty, there are always those who look for an easy way out and call for devaluation as though that would be a solution to our problems. It would not. It would be a ticket to renewed inflation and higher interest rates. Devaluation serves only to make us poorer by stoking up inflation and destroying jobs. Its benefits are illusory and its costs only too evident. The strongest economies in the world—the German and the Japanese—have been those with strong currencies.

For the British economy to be competitive, we must set ourselves free of the devaluation culture. Prosperity, competitiveness and lower interest rates all depend on getting inflation down to the level of our main competitors. Nothing else will do. We cannot allow ourselves to be blown off course now that a low inflation objective is firmly within our sights. [*Interruption.*] That may be described as "suicide", but I ask hon. Members to bear in mind what the CBI says. It has rather more courage than some hon. Members and all Opposition Members. The CBI has supported not just ERM entry but the policies necessary to keep us in it. It recognises that, more than anything, making ERM membership work is the secure route to sustainable interest rate cuts.

Of course I recognise the burdens that high interest rates place on industry, although the real burden is the amount by which interest rates exceed the rate at which companies can raise their prices. Judged by that yardstick, our real interest rates are lower than those in France, Germany and Italy.

Most companies are not powerless in the present situation. They have choices. If they are to prosper, they will control their unit costs and agree realistic, affordable wage settlements. Firms would gain two to three times more from cutting their wage settlements by 1 per cent. than they do from a 1 per cent. cut in interest rates. If costs are held down, the downturn will be shorter and less severe and the level at which unemployment will peak will be lower.

Control of costs will speed the reduction of inflation, but we are already making progress. In the past few months, headline inflation has fallen from its peak of 10·9

[Mr. Lamont]

per cent. in October to 9·3 per cent. Underlying inflation is also on its way down—falling from 8·4 per cent. to 7·7 per cent.—and it will fall further.

In the last recession, in 1980-81, the fall in inflation led to an upturn in activity because real incomes rose and because, as confidence came back, people saved less and spent more. That process will work again this time. That is why the vast majority of independent forecasters predict an upturn in the second half of the year. Other factors may work in the same direction.

The fall in the oil price will reduce business costs and lighten the uncertainty which is depressing activity. The rundown of stocks which has contributed to the fall in output is bound, by its nature, to come to a stop.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The right hon. Gentleman is making forecasts about the future course of inflation but is not yet making any forecast about the future course of unemployment. I hope that he will do so before the end of his speech. In December, the increase in unemployment was the highest for 10 years, which takes us back beyond the trough of the last Government-caused recession. Given that it is a lagging indicator, what is the right hon. Gentleman's forecast about unemployment for the next six to nine months?

Mr. Lamont: I shall present my forecasts at the time of the Budget. As the hon. Gentleman knows, no Government—whether Labour or Conservative—have presented unemployment forecasts. The Opposition seem to be interested in unemployment only when it rises—not in any of the 44 months when there was a remarkable growth in employment and when we created a situation in which unemployment in this country was below the European average. Not once did the Opposition give credit for that. Not once did they acknowledge the benefit that this country had.

Recovery, when it comes, will build on the eight remarkably good years that firms have behind them—years in which total investment in the economy grew by 67 per cent., manufacturing productivity rose by 51 per cent., and profitability reached its highest levels since the early 1970s. By 1990, firms had enjoyed a sustained period of high growth, high investment, improved productivity and healthy profits. That is why, in a recent survey of businesses, 80 per cent. of respondents indicated that they thought they were in better shape now to weather a recession than they had been 10 years ago. That is encouraging. Looking to the testing time that faces British business, I agree that it is in a much better position and in much better shape than it was a decade ago.

I now turn to the other half of the autumn statement—the Government's public expenditure plans. These show that the Government are keeping firm control of public expenditure, despite higher-than-expected inflation. The planning totals for 1991-92 and 1992-93 are lower, in real terms, than we planned a year ago, but within these constraints, we have made sure that the most vulnerable groups do not suffer from the inroads of higher inflation. We have substantially increased resources for health and other priority services. At the same time, we have continued to look for ways of improving the working of the economy.

Allowing for the cost improvement programmes, spending on health next year will be more than £3 billion higher than in 1990-91—a real increase of over 5 per cent.

We plan to spend over £30 billion on the health service next year. That gives the lie to the Labour Party's constant carping that the Government are not committed to the future of the health service. We have added over 70 per cent. in real terms to the health service capital programme in England since 1978-79. As all my hon. Friends know well, under Labour, capital spending on health was cut by 16 per cent. in real terms. Under the last Labour Government, health spending, in terms of today's prices, was only £365 per head. Next year the comparable figure will be more than £500.

Let us compare Labour's record with the real increase, in 1991-92, of almost 50 per cent. that we have made in spending on the health service in England since taking office. Our spending on health over the last decade has meant treatment for 30 per cent. more acute in-patients each year—almost 7 million in total—employment for 53,000 more nurses and midwives, and the completion of almost 500 major capital schemes.

In this year's autumn statement, we also added nearly £3 billion to social security plans. The bulk of this reflects the benefit upratings which will take effect in April this year. We have fully honoured our commitments to uprate benefits for pensioners and the poor, and we have done this even when, as this year, the RPI is on a downward trend from the figure on which the uprating was based. Indeed, for the poorest pensioners, the income support premium has been uprated by more than that.

On education, the plans announced will finance a further significant increase in student numbers. One in five of the 18 to 19 age group are now in higher education, compared with only one in eight in 1979. We have increased the support available to higher education institutions by about 10 per cent. between this year and next, and provided extra resources for student grants, loans and access funds.

The Opposition always claim that the Government neglect higher education, but the dramatic increase in the numbers of young people in higher education belies this. What do the Opposition make of the fact that the number of qualifications in higher education gained by young people as a share of the relevant age group, is higher in the United Kingdom than in West Germany, France, Italy —indeed, almost any other European country?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Before the Chancellor leaves his claims about providing benefits for people on low incomes, will he tell us why the Government do not restore the link between pensions and employment, particularly in view of their claim that employment has been booming and that wages are high? Is that not a deliberate act by the Government to deny pensioners a share in what the Government claim is prosperity?

Mr. Lamont: Attractive though huge sums of extra public expenditure might be to the hon. Gentleman, we simply could not afford to index pensions to earnings. I think the hon. Gentleman meant earnings when he referred to employment.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues on the Front Bench stop comparing our record with that of the Labour Government? In no way, incident or Department

can the record of that Labour Government hold a candle to ours. After 11 years of Conservative government, the Opposition can only choose eccentric foreign comparisons.

Mr. Lamont: I apologise to my hon. Friend if I am guilty of tedious repetition. What happened under the Labour Government seems unbelievable and it seems to have happened so long ago, but the point about the comparisons is that the Labour party seems determined to repeat the mistakes made by the last Labour Government.

In the last two public spending rounds, the Government have agreed huge increases in spending on roads. This year our priority has been rail—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that the bad weather is not part of the public spending round. However, public transport investment in the years covered by the autumn statement will be double that of the previous three years. That is an increase of more than 70 per cent. in real terms.

In areas to which the Opposition often refer, the Government have provided nearly £6 billion for spending on science and technology next year. We have added an extra £17 million to the science budget of the Department of Education and Science in 1991-92. That is up about 20 per cent. in real terms on its 1979 level.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary will refer in detail to the public expenditure effects of the Gulf. However, the costs of the Gulf are obviously substantial and uncertain. We are already committed this year and in later years to expenditure totalling £1.5 billion in addition to normal defence spending. We must expect eventual costs, allowing for a continuation of the air campaign and the likelihood of a land campaign, to be very much higher. It is impossible to be precise, but the figure of £3 billion that has been mentioned is probably not far from the mark.

There is, of course, no cash limit or predetermined budget. We have made it clear—I am happy to repeat the pledge today—that our forces will not be cash constrained in any way. I am therefore especially grateful for the assistance pledged by friends and allies around the world. Germany has promised about £275 million in addition to a previous package of assistance and Kuwait £660 million, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has announced. The United Arab Emirates promised about £250 million, following the recent trip of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Other countries, including Saudi Arabia, Japan, Hong Kong and other European and Commonwealth countries, have also made contributions, and we are grateful to them all.

In total, contributions already promised amount to some £1·4 billion and I hope that it will be possible to announce a higher figure before long as discussions with a number of countries come to fruition. Despite the extra costs of the war in the Gulf, public expenditure remains under firm control. That is a key element in our economic policy and has been since 1979 because it has allowed us to provide extra resources for priority services while at the same time achieving a transformation of public finances. We do not intend to change that approach now.

To sum up, I am well aware that the recession is hitting companies and individuals hard. However, inflation is falling and, as in the past, that will provide the basis for recovery in future. British industry faces a challenging and difficult period. However, it is today better managed and in better shape than it was 10 years ago. With a period of strong growth behind them and low inflation ahead, I am sure that firms in future will emerge from the recession able to compete and take advantage of the single market. I believe that the 1990s like the 1980s can be years of prosperity for Britain and for British business.

While the next few months will not be easy—indeed, they will be difficult—our position is plain. Unlike the Labour party, we know where we are going—I have not referred to the Labour party or its policies so far, but I will make one prediction about the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. When he is interrupted by my hon. Friends and asked what his policies for dealing with inflation are, he will say, as he always has in the past, "I shall be coming to that point later in my speech"—but he never does, because he has no answers.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman likes to pretend that inflation can be curbed painlessly. He likes to pretend that inflation can be curbed without reducing demand. How one can actually curb inflation without reducing demand is a mystery known to no one but himself. There is no way in which demand can be curbed other than by using interest rates or taxes or by cutting public spending, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman professes to be against all those.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has no policy. The Labour party is hollow. When we knock Labour Members, all that we ever get is an echo—an echo of the past. If Labour Members have anything to say on policy, all that we hear is a little bit more intervention, more spending, a few credit controls and, of course, a little more inflation. It was all well summed up in *Marxism Today* —*[Interruption.]*.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): It is a Tory paper. That is a damnable slur.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. *Marxism Today* is now a moderate paper, and far more realistic and worth reading than anything that comes from the Labour party. *Marxism Today* stated:

> "In the '80s, far from being a major engagement with the modern world, Labour's transformation depended on an intellectual package designed for the '50s and '60s, together with a profoundly timid anti-Thatcherism. The Party has no project of its own: it lives in the shadow of others. As a result, it has feet of clay."

I could not put it better myself. We know what our policies are. We are confident about facing the future, and I commend to my right hon. and hon. Friends the Government's plans as set out in the autumn statement.

4.31 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

> 'declines to approve the Autumn Statement; deplores the continued mismanagement of the economy which has plunged all parts of the nation into severe economic recession causing an unprecedented and avoidable level of business failures and rapidly rising unemployment; condemns the failure of the Government to invest in the economic infrastructure and in vital public services; and calls upon the Government to adopt an economic strategy which lowers the interest rate burden on industry, commerce and millions of mortgage payers and which promotes the recovery of a wealth creating economy, particularly in the manufacturing sector, by encouraging sustained investment in new technology, in regional development, and in the skills of people.'.

[Mr. John Smith]

I suppose that the Chancellor was fortunate that, during his defensive and gloomy speech, which was brought to an end by a rather spluttering and incoherent attack on the Opposition, he was unable to look behind him and see Conservative Members' faces. There was not much joy about on the Conservative Benches, just a sense of gloom and a sense of sickening reality as their constituents remind them of the consequences of the Government's economic policies.

Of course, as usual, the right hon. Gentleman attacked the Opposition. I am accustomed, rightly, to having my speeches attacked after they have been made, but this is the first time that I have had one attacked before it has even been delivered. I certainly intend to criticise the Conservative Government and their economic policies. If that is regarded as tedious repetition, Conservative Members had better get used to it because they will hear quite a lot of it, and not just from Opposition Members but from people all over the country who are suffering the effects of their policies.

For the past 11 years, Conservative policies have been an exercise in roller-coaster economics. At the start of the 1980s, we had a deep and damaging recession that did lasting damage to our economy, particularly to manufacturing. Once again, as we enter the 1990s, we have to suffer yet another Conservative home-made recession which yet again threatens damage to our real economy. In between those two recessions we have had, in typical Tory style, an inflationary credit-led boom, all in the well-established post-war tradition of the Maudling dash for growth, the Barber boom and, most recently, the credit spree of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). Conservative economics is about stop-go and stop again —the economics of boom and bust.

The Chancellor's rather weary defence of the Government's economic policies showed no sign of appreciating that phenomenon. He made much of the Government's determination to conquer inflation. Of course, that is a constant refrain, but many in the House will recollect the claims made in the middle of the past decade that the battle against inflation had been won. Since there has been a Conservative Government in power all along, naturally we wonder how the problem recurred. Who were the authors of the misfortune? Who caused the inflation from which we are suffering? Surely it cannot have been the previous Labour Government, the trade unions or the nasty foreigners. The truth is beginning to dawn on some Conservative Members that it might just be the Government whom they support. That is the inevitable conclusion to which one is driven. That is why we must all measure with care protestations about their commitment to fight inflation.

I have little doubt that the inflation rate will fall in the months ahead. It is the inevitable consequence of pushing the economy into a deep and damaging recession. Inflation will come down, but by this method the price in the destruction of economic capacity and rising unemployment will be high, and our economic prospects for the 1990s will be undermined. To avoid that outcome the case for interest rate reduction is overwhelming. So even a 0·5 per cent. cut would be better than no cut, but there can be little doubt that it is too little, too late.

Interest rates should have been cut before the end of last year and, in the absence of such action, by 1 per cent. today. The 0·5 per cent. cut will bring no relief to hard-pressed mortgage payers and it will be seen as inadequate by most of industry and commerce. I quote the chairman of the National Federation of Small Businesses, Mr. Tony Miller, who said today:

"It's a pity the Chancellor did not have the courage to have at least a full 1 per cent. cut. This really is playing at the edges with a serious problem."

Last week the Leader of the Opposition urged a cut in interest rates. The riposte by the Prime Minister was that that was a panic reaction. A week later we find that the Government have taken at least part of my right hon. Friend's advice. Might it possibly have something to do with the debate occurring today? It strains credulity for the Government to maintain that the cut in interest rates announced this morning has nothing to do with the debate this afternoon. It has all the hallmarks of the botched entry into the exchange rate mechanism and the previous reduction in interest rates timed to precede the Conservative party conference.

I learned only this morning that Downing street sources have been rebutting the charge of political timing by stressing that the Government made the decision last week to cut interest rates. If that be the case, what on earth was the Prime Minister doing accusing the Opposition of panic when he himself in that same week had decided to make the cut? Either he was being completely disingenuous, to put it at its mildest, or he himself is guilty of the panic that he identified with a cut in interest rates. Before selecting his next weapon, our Prime Minister should bear in mind the drawbacks of the boomerang.

The purpose of the debate is to discuss the autumn statement presented to the House as long ago as last November by the Chancellor's predecessor.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): The right hon. and learned Gentleman was talking about credulity and credibility in connection with interest rates policy. Does he realise that everything that he and the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) have said over the years would have carried much more credibility if it had not been the case that, whatever the level of interest rates, they always said that rates should be a point lower?

Mr. Smith: When we have been dealing with a Government committed to such high and sustained interest rates, it is not surprising that we should consistently want a cut in interest rates.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as I have answered the first point. Surely he will allow me the courtesy of answering his hon. Friend. His seniority is not so advanced that he can interrupt in the middle of an answer.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) should bear in mind that people have had to suffer high interest rates for a very long time, since 1988. That is why we constantly seek a reduction.

Mr. Tebbit: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly says, I should not expect to interrupt him in the course of his answer—I am not optimistic about him ever

giving an answer. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said that—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Tebbit: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said that, under this Government, interest rates have always been too high. Does he mean that interest rates were too high during what we now recognise as an excessive boom in 1988?

Mr. Smith: If the right hon. Gentleman had listened to the answer that I gave his hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington, he would know that I stressed that I meant the period when high interest rates were not quite so high. I honestly do not know what point the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was making. He seemed to become confused while making it.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): If the hon. and learned Gentleman is unsure of the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), let me repeat it. He was making the point that, when interest rates were 7·5 per cent. in 1988, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was still calling for further reductions.

Hon. Members: Why?

Mr. Smith: Because at that time there was a danger, following the collapse in the world stock markets—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Indeed there was, and that was the policy followed by the Government. There was then a problem. The Opposition will not be satisfied until interest rates in this country are roughly equivalent to interest rates in other competitor countries in the European Community. That should be the objective of any sensible Government.

I do not understand why satisfaction should be gained from the fact that there have been high levels of interest rates. The price of money is crucial to investment, which is the lifeblood of any economy. The most depressing prospect at present is the cutting off of investment.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I must get on with my speech about the autumn statement. I have done well in giving way to hon. Members.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way for the moment. I seem to have done nothing but give way to interventions for the past seven or eight minutes.

The autumn statement gave us a picture of the economy. In 1991, the gross domestic product was predicted to grow by 0·5 per cent., which was not encouraging. Manufacturing output was predicted to decline by 0·5 per cent. and fixed investment was said to be going to fall by 1·75 per cent. We were told, gloomily, that the balance of payments would remain in deficit by £11 billion. It was predicted that, by the end of the year, inflation would be down to 5·5 per cent. Those, in a nutshell, were the economic predictions, from none of which the Chancellor has departed in his speech today.

Most commentators did not regard that picture of the economy in 1991 as much of a cause for celebration. In particular, the estimates for output, growth and investment gave signs of a year of problems for the economy. Although the then Chancellor, the present Prime Minister, persistently avoided the use of the word "recession", the figures buried at the back of the autumn statement showed a fall in output for four successive quarters up to the middle of 1991. As the accepted definition of a "recession"—and one accepted by the Chancellor—is a fall in output for two successive quarters, the Government clearly knew that we were in recession as their own statement was being issued, whatever they said.

Why, then, would the Chancellor not allow the dreaded word to pass his lips? Perhaps it was because he himself, in 1989, in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, said that a recession would not occur, and he was expressly not forecasting such an outcome for the economy. He reinforced that prediction by telling the Association of British Chambers of Commerce on 5 December 1989:

"I do not believe myself that recession is likely or necessary."

When the present Chancellor gave evidence to the Select Committee a year later, he was reluctantly forced to admit that there was a recession. He said:

"There are reasons why one could believe that it will be relatively short-lived and relatively shallow."

We have a Prime Minister who told us that a recession would not happen and a Chancellor who told us that it would be shallow and short-lived. I am glad that the Select Committee did not buy that information and, in its report, made it clear that it thought we were heading for a much more serious recession than did Ministers. I congratulate it on that part of its conclusions, at least.

We are in the midst of a recession which was supposed not to happen and which we were told by the occupant of the top seat in the Treasury would be shallow and short-lived. There are some familiar techniques at work, including a complacent but bogus reassurance about the future. When the facts catch up and belie the assurance, the technique is not to admit that anything is wrong but to issue further reassurance saying, "Not to worry. It will not be too bad or last too long. "Subsequent Chancellors have clearly learnt something from the right hon. Member for Blaby—he of "temporary blip" fame.

In recent weeks, keen students of the art of bland but bogus reassurance will have noticed a new twist to the technique. As it cannot be denied that the recession exists, we are told—this formed part of the Chancellor's speech today—that it is part of a malign, worldwide experience, which is beyond our control and, from time to time, like some unfortunate turn of fate, affects even the best-ordered and managed of economies.

The Prime Minister was using that technique only last week at Prime Minister's Question Time when he claimed that unfair opposition in the form of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), the Leader of the Opposition, had overlooked the fact that there was also a recession in other countries. We heard that excuse at greater length from the Chancellor today. Before this particular bland but bogus reassurance takes hold of the Conservative party, it is time to look at the facts.

While it is true that the north American economies are in difficulties, not one member of the European Community, apart from the United Kingdom, is now in

[Mr. Smith]

recession or even forecast to be so. The compelling point is that people in those countries live in the same world—indeed, in the same region of that world—and are linked to us by close economic and political ties. At the end of next year, they will unite with us in one single market. It is not merely that those countries are not in recession; they actually continue to invest. Above all, they are investing in preparation for the single market after 1992.

According to the latest report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, on which the Government co-operate, as the Chancellor knows, the average increase in investment for 1991 in the European Community as a whole is 3 per cent., while the OECD forecasts a decline of 3·4 per cent. in the United Kingdom. Every Community country except the United Kingdom is avoiding a recession and increasing investment.

Even more worrying is the fact that, since the OECD published its report on 20 December last year, the United Kingdom's investment outlook has deteriorated even further. The official forecast of the Central Statistical Office for manufacturing investment for 1991 is a drop of 7 per cent. in the year. The Confederation of British Industry's recent industrial trends survey predicted an even more dramatic fall—the staggering and deeply depressing prediction of a fall in manufacturing investment of 16 per cent. Those and other facts show that a severe recession exists that is neither shallow nor short-lived. It is a recession built in Britain, and made in Downing street at Nos. 10 and 11.

The depressing facts of Britain's home-made recession are all around us. Business failures and mortgage repossessions are at record levels, and manufacturing output is falling—it is down by 5·6 per cent. since April of last year. Unemployment is rising inexorably. The last figures we have, for December, show an increase of 80,000 in one month. There are understandable fears about what the unemployment figures to be announced tomorrow will reveal. If this experience is shallow and short-lived, why are the results of the latest quarterly economic survey, published by the London chamber of commerce and industry, for London's economy the worst ever recorded since the survey started in 1978?

There has been a sharp acceleration in unemployment in London's service sector. One third of all firms reported that they had reduced their work force during the past three months. Unemployment in the capital grew at a rate of 14·7 per cent. in that one quarter. Only 24 per cent. of firms in manufacturing are working at full capacity, and 50 per cent. report a drop in domestic orders and deliveries. Against that background is it any wonder that, according to Dunn and Bradstreet, London and the south-east accounted for 45 per cent. of the bankruptcies in England and Wales last year.

Faced with that alarming situation, a Minister recently gave a revealing explanation of the Government's attitude to the problems in London and the south-east. In the *Financial Times* of 6 February, a Mr. Ralph Atkins canvassed the views of Tory Members on the economy. In the midst of much fascinating information and, to be fair, many protestations of confidence in the Government's handling of the economy, such as one would expect, the views of one unidentified Minister are reported as follows:

"One Minister was adamant that high interest rates remained the purgative needed to flush out the 'unreal, yuppie jobs in the South-East' created in the last part of the 1980s just as the recession early last decade had cleared out the 'unreal' jobs created by Labour."

I wonder whether that revealing view of the Government's concerns is being repeated in London and the south-east by Tory Members when they meet their constituents who have been thrown into unemployment by the severity of the recession.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Let me finish this point.

As *The Times* reminded us last week, unemployment is rising five times as fast in Conservative-held as in Labour-held constituencies, and the largest rise recorded is in the Conservative seats in the south-east, where unemployment has risen by 47·5 per cent. In those circumstances, I should give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My constituents in the south-east are particularly interested in Labour party policy on this. At this time last year the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said:

"What we are promising is an increase for pensioners and an increase in child benefit. Everything else that is regarded as a desirable aim"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] I am quoting—

"is also listed, quite clearly and specifically"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman making a comment or asking a question?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am asking a question. The quote continues:

"Everything else is listed . . . as something that we hope to do as resources allow."—[*Official Report, 13 February 1990;* Vol. 167, c. 179.]

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that that remains the position?

Mr. Smith: We have repeated our policy so often that it should have registered with the hon. Gentleman. We have made absolutely clear our commitment to old-age pensions and child benefit, and that our other commitments are contingent on the capabilities of the economy.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: What is important is that, under a Labour Government, the results of growth will go to public services, where they are desperately needed. I am sure that, if the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) has more such discussions with his constituents, he will find that they are most interested in Labour's policy. Their experience of Conservative policies, if nothing else, will have made them very interested in Labour's policy. They will be interested in how we can have an economy that revives in London and the south-east. They will wonder why they are suffering as much as they are now, and they will want the better public services and the greater social justice which will come under a Labour Government.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No. I give way to the hon. Gentleman so often and he never asks me anything of any sense, so I shall not give way to him today.

I wonder how many Tory Members tell their constituents not to worry, that the recession is short-lived and shallow and, in any event, that the jobs they lost were unreal. It was one thing for hon. Gentlemen to be cavalier about the jobs lost in the early 1980s in the manufacturing areas of the north which, for the most part, are represented by Labour Members. That was the last time we heard about unreal jobs. It is another thing—this surely explains the anonymity of the Minister whom I am quoting—to tell that to their own constituents in the south. I predict that their constituents' reply will be sharp and to the point. Their mortgages and poll tax payments are all too real and must continue to be met after the so-called unreal jobs have gone.

Let us bear in mind and not forget, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer tended to do, the burdens that come from high interest rates. There has been a huge increase in mortgage repayments throughout the country, but particularly in London, since the summer of 1988. In London, the average monthly payment for a first-time buyer increased from £555·53 on 1 August 1988 to £662·18 in January 1991—a total extra payment of £2,683·75. That is the mortgage misery inflicted by the Government's high interest rate policies. All over the nation, the same oppressive burden is being borne. In the west midlands, for example, the average payment for a first-time buyer in August 1988 was £253·48 and it is now £302·15—a total extra payment of £1,200·09.

With such dramatic increases in the financial burdens borne by ordinary people, is it any surprise that court actions for mortgage arrears have increased in the midlands by 72 per cent. and in London by a massive 121 per cent.? We know that, all over the nation, the number of borrowers falling into arrears and the number of houses repossessed in 1990 is nearly double the worst year on record.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Let me finish.

Now the public understand the full meaning of the Prime Minister's celebrated justification for his policies —that "if it isn't hurting, it isn't working". They know from bitter experience that it is hurting severely, but where, they ask, is it working?

Mr. Taylor *rose*——

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Smith: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and then to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Taylor: In reality, mortgage increases hurt. Given, by his own admission earlier in his speech, that the right hon. and learned Gentleman advocated that interest rates should fall further in 1988, the switch in eradicating inflation which his policies would have generated would have had to be even tougher and to take even longer. Is not the way of maintaining our stability within the exchange rate mechanism guaranteed only by this Government's policies, not by the cut-and-run policy which the right hon. and learned Gentleman is now advocating, which would lead to further devaluation and, ultimately, stoke inflationary fuel again?

Mr. Smith: To believe that the only way to tackle inflation is to subject the economy to the punishment of the high interest rate regime for as long as we have suffered from one is an admission of failure and dismay. Other countries in the European Community can achieve low levels of inflation without having to suffer.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No; I have given way a great deal.

Hon. Members: Give way.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): The right hon. and learned Gentleman should give way.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman did not give way to me at all on the last occasion. Let me finish the point.

The Government's case is that the only way to tackle inflation is by high interest rates. I dispute that. It is not the experience of other countries in the European Community.

Ms. Abbott: The House will have heard Tory Members laughing when my right hon. and learned Friend mentioned mortgage arrears in London. He will be aware, as all London Members are aware, that property prices in London have meant that mortgage burdens are particularly crippling. If he speaks, as I speak day in and day out, to young couples who bought their house in the latter part of the 1980s on the crest of the enterprise and home-owning bubble and now face repossession, he will agree that mortgage arrears in London are no laughing matter.

Mr. Smith: It is important to give some attention in this debate to the problems facing people in difficult circumstances which flow directly from the Government's policies. I am sorry to say that the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not manage to find a word to say about them in his speech.

Mr. Mellor: Where is the pain-free alternative? What policy is the right hon. and learned Gentleman proposing?

Mr. Smith: I do not think that I have ever heard a question such as that from any Minister since I came to the House of Commons—*[Interruption.]* I accept that the Chief Secretary appeared to have a genuinely inquiring tone. He knows that his Government's policies are not working, so he says in despair, "Is there something better?" I give him one. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman were to rid his mind of some of its prejudices, he would carefully consider the use of credit controls to control demand rather than high interest rates. That would be a much better and a much less painful alternative. After all, it is what some European countries do, and they appear to get by without difficulty. I shall cherish the right hon. and learned Gentleman's intervention long after the memory of this debate has faded.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have given way a number of times, and I shall not do so again.

Mr. Sedgemore: Have another go.

Mr. Smith: The Chief Secretary appears to be resisting my hon. Friend's blandishments. He is wise to do so. One

[Mr. Smith]

thing that the right hon. and learned Gentleman—[Hon. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I just gave the right hon. and learned Gentleman the answer.

The constituents of Conservative Members will be wary about relying on a Government forecast of the economy. Their estimate of the recession was wrong, so how can we believe their assertion that there will be a near-miraculous recovery in the second half of this year? That is, I understand, still their assertion.

When the former Chancellor, now the Prime Minister, presented his autumn statement, he told us that the British economy was coming back on track. A similar confident assurance was made by the present Chancellor in the Budget debate last year. He is fond of quoting others, so I shall remind him of what he said last year. Bearing in mind that there might be a question such as that just asked by the Chief Secretary, I shall quote the Chancellor exactly. When he was Chief Secretary, he said:

"Pain there may be, but gain there will also be. By this time next year, the prospects will be distinctly brighter."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1144.]

That was the Chancellor's promise in his Budget speech last March. Can any hon. Member honestly say that things are distinctly brighter because of the Government's policies? They may be brighter for some, but they are pretty dim for most of my constituents and for the constituents of most hon. Members.

A year later, we know all about the pain, but what about the gain? Is that put off for yet another year? Will we have the gain if we are patient, with everything coming right as the economic cycle reasserts itself and the country goes into economic recovery?—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) should be concerned about what is happening to the industrial economy of the west midlands.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I suppose that I rather provoked the hon. Gentleman, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. King: A few months ago, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was asked to state Labour's alternative policy, and he came up with something he described as credit controls. Is he saying that nobody should be able to obtain a mortgage or buy anything in this country that he cannot afford? That would stop British industry in its tracks and ruin the housing market. It is no answer to the problem.

Mr. Smith: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because I thought that he might be concerned about the industrial economy of the west midlands. I thought that he would deal with that in his intervention. I am sorry to say that I was disappointed. He should bear in mind what industrialists from his area are saying. I noticed an article in the *Financial Times* the other day, which said:

"Small and medium-sized manufacturing companies in the West Midlands are reducing investment and training programmes".

The Engineering Employers Federation is telling the Government that there is nothing but misery in the west midlands, yet what does one of that area's representative do in the House of Commons? He makes silly interventions. The hon. Gentleman would do better to speak for his constituents and for the companies that he should represent.

There is supposed to be a dramatic recovery in the second half of this year, but the only basis for believing that it will occur is to take the Chancellor's word for it —or even the former Chancellor's word for it. I fear that, on the record of recent years, there is no basis upon which such a naive confidence could be based. To achieve a recovery from a recession, there must be a change of course—the very option that has been excluded both by the former and the present Chancellors. That is why we have no confidence in their ability to lead us out of the recession into which they have driven this country.

The Government should today have cut interest rates by 1 per cent. and they should be ready, as conditions permit, to make further reductions to bring our interest rates nearer to the levels prevailing in the remainder of the European Community. Further interest rate reductions will be necessary to avoid even more sharp falls in investment, output and employment, and to assist our country's prospects for economic success in the single market.

However, a cut in interest rates, even if extensive, is not enough on its own to ensure a recovery from recession. Above all, we must take steps to arrest the deadly decline in investment. There is simply no way in which we can either recover or begin the long process of catching up with the leading countries of the European Community unless investment is made and maintained in new plant and equipment, new technologies and new enterprises.

That is why the Opposition urge that fiscal incentives for investment in manufacturing industry should be introduced in the forthcoming Budget. Britain's position is now so critical that the Government should abandon their somewhat inconsistent adherence to so-called fiscal neutrality. Both the CBI and the TUC recommend such proposals, and the Government should heed them. However, it is not enough to encourage investment in plant and machinery. The tragedy is that we have a colossal skills crisis in the midst of a severe recession. How foolish can it be to organise a skills shortage in the midst of rapidly rising unemployment? Investment in the skills of our people is vital. If the Government want something to do, if they want a prescription for action—and the Chief Secretary is the best man to do it—the Government should immediately reverse the cuts in the training budgets, which are part of the autumn statement and which were highlighted in the debate on training last week.

Investment is also required—both public and private —to renew the crumbling infrastructure that a decade of Conservative neglect has caused. In almost all my discussions with industrial managers, I am reminded of their belief that the Government have failed in their responsibility to provide the necessary infrastructure for sound industrial development. That investment must, in large part, be made in the regions, which are now being as seriously affected by the recession as the south-east. As the recession bites deeper and deeper into the industrial regions, the north-south divide, which does so much harm to our economy and to our society, will deepen.

In our debates on the autumn statement and the public spending programme, we must remember that, although we need a strong economy—and, given that there is a recession, it is natural that we should concentrate on that —we must also aim for a fair society. The tragedy is that during the past decade the Conservative party has achieved neither.

In a recent article on the latest edition of *Social Trends*, the *Financial Times* commented:

"Britain has entered the nineteen nineties with the image of a land where the rich get richer, the poor poorer, and the rest live on credit."

Social Trends shows that the proportion of income in the hands of the top 20 per cent. of households increased during the 1980s to reach 39 per cent. in 1987 compared with 34 per cent. in 1979. In sharp contrast, there has been a steady fall in the share going to the bottom 20 per cent., from 10·1 per cent. in 1979 to 8·9 per cent. in 1987.

Mr. Maude: They are better off.

Mr. Smith: They are not better off. The figures prove that the trickle-down theory does not work. Many people are worse off as a result of 11 years of Conservative government. Conservative Members should catch up on their statistics. Indeed, the Government recently had to correct statistics that supported the contention of Conservative Members. The sad thing about these figures, which stop in 1987, bad though they are—statistics that the Government find uncomfortable seemed to stop two or three years ago—is that they exclude the malign effect of the 1988 Budget, with its tax rate cuts for the top tax payers, followed within a matter of weeks by slashing cuts in housing benefit and income support.

The Opposition deplore a Government whose policies fail to achieve economic strength and continually undermine the foundations of a fair society, and many people in Britain are coming to agree with us more and more. Like the people we represent, we look with dismay at the continuing decline in our vital public services. We look at a Government who have neither competence to recommend them nor good social purpose to stand in its place. We stand for a strong economy and a fair society. Britain needs a new start, and it is clear that to achieve it, it will need a new Government.

5.10 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): It is now more than three months since the then Chancellor introduced his autumn statement. I suppose that it is true to say that both in terms of domestic political events and in terms of events in the middle east, there has rarely been a more extraordinary and difficult period at home and abroad.

As a result, economic affairs have tended to be put in the background. Meanwhile, the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service has been taking evidence and has produced a report on the autumn statement. I am grateful for the remarks by both Front-Bench spokesmen on the work of that Committee which enables the House to debate matters in more depth than would otherwise be the case.

One point that has emerged clearly from the debate so far is that the original cause of the recession was in many respects the need to deal with the overheating of the economy which took place after the stock exchange crash in 1987, and that overheating would have been worse if the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) had been in charge because he wished to lower interest rates even more than the Government.

I want first to comment on the Government's forecast with regard to the recession and inflation. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee went at some length into those issues and, taking all the factors into account, concluded that the recession is likely to be deeper and longer in duration than the Treasury forecasts.

That is an important conclusion. The Committee's report on last year's Budget came to the conclusion that the Treasury always underestimates turning points in the economy, whether a turn downwards or upwards, and that that error has become bigger on every successive cycle. We repeated that analysis in our report on the autumn statement. Therefore, I fear that we reached the conclusion, which is reflected in the report, that the recession will be longer and deeper than would otherwise have been expected.

On the other hand, the Committee, which over the years has brought to the attention of the House the way in which the Treasury's inflation forecasts have not been achieved, reaches the conclusion on this occasion that the rate of inflation which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor predicted of about 5·5 per cent. by the end of 1991 is likely to be achieved. That is crucial in determining whether the economy recovers in the way in which he suggests. We reached the conclusion that the inflation forecast is much more reliable than has been the case in the past.

There is no doubt that in comparison with 1980-81 there is a substantial difference in the pattern of the recession. The regional pattern is different. The recession has undoubtedly hit the south more than it did in 1980-81 and there is a significant difference in the finances of the corporate and banking sectors. I was a little concerned about my right hon. Friend's comment on that, because in paragraph 23 the Select Committee points out:

"The financial deficit of industrial and commercial companies ... is unprecedented both in its sheer size (especially for this stage of the economic cycle and because this is the third successive year of financial deficits."

It goes on to point out:

"the corporate sector is finding it increasingly difficult to arrange the necessary finance in the short term."

It also says that the banking system is

"cautious following a number of major corporate insolvencies"

and is

"far less accommodating than previously."

That is a worrying development, in marked contrast to the situation in 1980-81, when many banks went beyond their normal prudential limits in order to preserve companies which had a long-term future. Therefore, that particular aspect gives especial cause for concern.

Having said that, I ask the simple question—what should we do now? My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right to say that inflation should be the top priority. If we weaken on the objective of reducing inflation, we may obtain some short-term relief, but we would undoubtedly greatly increase the problems in the medium and the longer term.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East advocated a 1 per cent. cut in interest rates today and, apparently, more later, but it was interesting that he did not say whether he would do that regardless of whether it meant that we had to have a realignment of exchange rates. He was remarkably coy on that point.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made it clear in evidence to the Select Committee and in statements to the House that there is no question of a reduction in interest rates which is not fully justified by our position in the exchange rate mechanism. The cut this afternoon shows clearly that he has been prudent in making that

[Mr. Terence L. Higgins]

change because the exchange rate appears to have responded favourably. I hope that we shall see further progress.

However, we do not know what will happen in the Budget, but the reaction of the market to the Budget will be important and it would be a mistake to reduce interest rates significantly before we know how the market reacts to what my right hon. Friend says in his Budget statement.

However, I am clear that to throw caution to the winds, to reduce interest rates substantially now and to have a devaluation and a realignment of the exchange rate would simply put us back on the old inflationary spiral. Suggestions that we may do that are likely to delay the time when we can prudently reduce interest rates. Therefore, my right hon. Friend's policy on that is right.

As recommended in the Select Committee's report, interest rates have been devoted to maintaining the position of sterling in the exchange rate mechanism within the limits which have been set, so they are no longer available to deal with the domestic situation. The Committee deals with that at considerable length, and it is a view that we have taken over the years. But it is more important in the context of membership of the ERM. The Committee reached the conclusion:

"We consider it to be unwise for the Chancellor to rule out the use of fiscal measures to affect the level of economic activity in all circumstances when the level of interest rates is determined by the commitment to maintain the parity of sterling in the ERM, particularly now when the depth and the duration of the current economic slow down is so uncertain."

I welcome the fact that the Chancellor, in contrast to the statement made by the previous Chancellor when he introduced the autumn statement, has said that he will allow the so-called automatic stabilisers to operate fully —that is to say, the natural increase in public sector borrowing or decline in surplus which would come about as a result of the recession; the fall in tax receipts on the one hand, and more unemployment benefits and so on on the other. It is tremendously important that that should not be inhibited. It is also important to get it over to markets in advance of the Budget that that would in no way mean a weakening of my right hon. Friend's determination to bring inflation under control. It is highly likely that the extent of the public surplus or deficit will change radically as a result.

The case for a more active fiscal policy—in terms not only of taxation but of public expenditure—is appropriate in the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, in endeavouring to reduce the duration and depth of the recession. As we cannot use the interest rate weapon, for the reasons that I have explained, fiscal changes are important.

I will give one example. It is absurd that the hospital building programme should grind to a halt because regional hospital chairmen will not sell land, believing that it will be worth more in two years' time, say. In such circumstances, it would be entirely appropriate to allow some relaxation of the Government's position on public expenditure, for they know that the money will come in later, and because at this stage in the cycle, the construction industry is seriously underutilised. The Committee makes an overwhelming case for the adoption of a more active policy, particularly now that we are in the ERM.

My final point concerns an aspect that we have not debated for some time. I refer to pay policy. Over the years, the House has seen many forms of pay and incomes policy, and I myself have lived through everything from total laissez-faire to the most rigorous statutory prices and incomes policy that one could envisage. One neglects pay policy in the public sector and its repercussions for the private sector at one's peril.

Although the leader in *The Times* was unduly harsh on my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, recent settlements in the public sector have caused me concern. Pay in the private sector has been coming down more rapidly than the Confederation of British Industry's figures suggest. In fact, the CBI itself takes that view. That is good for the purpose of getting down the underlying rate of inflation, but public sector settlements should be subject to the kind of policy that we adopted many years ago, involving the so-called N minus 1 formula, which provided effective scrutiny.

In those days, it was a good rule of thumb that, whatever a Department told the Treasury was the increase in pay, the true figure was roughly double that, because of fringe benefits and so on. Unless public sector awards are scrutinised with the utmost vigour by the Treasury and by Ministers, the opportunity to reduce the underlying rate of inflation at a reasonable pace will be seriously jeopardised.

I am concerned also about the argument that pay awards are all right provided that they are staged. Public sector pay is governed by cash limits and running costs, but to store up problems next year by staging a pay agreement from one year to the next is not satisfactory. I am not suggesting that the public sector should be dealt with unfairly. If inflation continues, everyone suffers, but we must achieve a gradual decline. Despite all the Government's preoccupations with the Gulf war, the European Economic Community, and a single currency, they ought to give priority to that aspect.

My right hon. Friend's basic message this afternoon was that his policy, within the ERM, of bearing down on inflation will continue, and be brought to a successful conclusion—and that necessarily means that interest rates cannot be lowered until the market views that as a prudent action, and downward pressures are not exerted on the exchange rate.

I believe that the market grossly underestimates the extent to which there is already downward pressure within the economy. The recession figures themselves show that clearly. However, against the general background of my right hon. Friend's policy, the autumn statement naturally looks rather different from the way that it looked last November, and we await with interest the official forecasts that will be published when my right hon. Friend presents his Budget on 19 March—which will, I am sure, take into account the points that I thought it right to draw to the attention of the House.

5.24 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): We are in a serious recession—more serious than the Government anticipated at the time of the autumn statement. That is the difference between how we view it now from how it appeared, at least to the Government's own supporters, on the day it was published. That point was also made by the Select Committee.

The anxiety that is felt about the Government's policy response stems from the belief that continuing high interest rates will make the recession worse. I share that fear. Interest rates must come down, but in a way that does not serve to increase inflation and lead to the reappearance of the very problems that caused them to be so high in the first place.

The only alternatives offered so far are to reduce interest rates and hang the consequences, as advocated by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), or to reduce them in the knowledge of the consequences, which is the preferred option of some Conservative Members—the consequence in that case being devaluation of the pound and the abandonment of sterling's place in the exchange rate mechanism. That, too, would lead to continuing fears about inflation, and unremitting pressure to increase interest rates yet again. Commerce and industry need not just a reduction in interest rates but a sustainable reduction—and a pattern that more closely matches that of our competitors.

Earlier, there was an interesting exchange when the Chancellor rejected the devaluation option, saying that the strongest economies in the world have strong currencies. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) added sotto voce—in so far as he ever utters anything sotto voce—"and low interest rates." One could also add the words, "and low inflation". The strongest economies manage to combine all three.

However, the Government did not give us low inflation, or price stability, but they are still promising that interest rates will remain higher than in our competitor countries. The Government forecast—to the extent that they ever forecast it—that underlying inflation, which is something on which Chancellors have always laid great stress, will not fall that much. The Chancellor referred to a fall, but he is not forecasting that it will be below 6 per cent. I will be really generous and suggest a figure of 5·5 per cent. One is referring to a rate of inflation from which mortgage interest is excluded—the rate by which Chancellors and other Treasury Ministers set so much store.

The rate will remain worryingly high even when the supposed effectiveness of the painful cure begins to show itself in the economy. The Government's credibility problem will not disappear, except to the extent that markets take the headline inflation figure as being the whole story. If they do that, the Government may be lucky, and their credibility may increase to the extent that greater interest rate reductions than now seem likely become possible.

Mr. John Smith: I recollect that, in debates last year, the hon. Gentleman opposed a cut in interest rates. Will he make it clear whether the Liberal Democrats are in favour of a 1 per cent. cut in interest rates?

Mr. Beith: My argument is that interest rates should be cut, but that, if they are to be reduced by any significant amount, other policy proposals must accompany that action.

The Chancellor reduced interest rates by half of 1 per cent. today. He decided on such a small reduction because he feared, understandably, that if he made a larger cut there would be dangerous inflationary consequences, arising from a loss of market credibility. I would have used the same reasoning, unless the measures that I am about to advocate were taken to ensure that the economy's credibility is enhanced, and that the Government are seen to oppose inflation. I want interest rates to come down, but I want them to stay down. If that is to be made possible, inflation must be defeated.

Mr. Budgen: How can the hon. Gentleman be sure that any policies that he advances to accompany a reduction in interest rates would be acceptable to speculators, as being likely to make the pound more attractive than the deutschmark? If everything is governed by the unpredictable relationship between the pound and the deutschmark, how can any of us be sure which particular factor acts on the minds of any one speculator, or on the minds of speculators generally? We keep hearing from the Chancellor and the Prime Minister that the pound will strengthen as inflation drops. It may—but no one can tell. It is like suggesting that the Prime Minister knows which horse will win the grand national.

Mr. Beith: It is a reasonable assumption that the greater strength of the deutschmark is related to the belief that it is stable and that prices are stable. It is not likely to be devalued and the worth of holding it is not likely to be reduced because it loses value in the economy of which it is a part. If we can change the perception of sterling so that it is viewed in a similar light, there will not be such a premium on the holding of sterling. Our present level of interest rates is the premium that we pay people who believe that this country is not as good at controlling inflation as Germany and other countries—that is manifestly the case.

We have to remove that premium, and the Government have totally failed to do so. The Government have been in power, committed to price stability and getting rid of inflation, for more than a decade, and they are still suffering from the problem that they came into power with. That is why the Government are unable to reduce interest rates by a greater amount.

I believe that we could achieve far greater interest rate cuts than this small half a per cent. cut, if it were accompanied by policies designed to ensure that people believe that we are serious about inflation. Why do I say that people are doubtful about our commitment to inflation? One reason is the way in which interest rates are reduced. Why did it happen today? The interest rate cut today was timed because of this debate, no matter how many days the Chancellor may have been thinking about cutting it. There is no doubt about it—the Chancellor is a politician to his fingertips. He knew that Government Back Benchers were uneasy and he wanted to provide some appeasement to that unease. I know that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), who nods, shares my view on this matter, because he is an accurate observer of the way that Governments behave.

There is clear precedent for that behaviour. When we entered the exchange rate mechanism there was a 1 per cent. cut in interest rates, which was timed for the opening of the Conservative party conference. We know, and it is on the public record, that the Governor of the Bank of England thought that that was an unwise moment at which to cut interest rates. He felt so strongly about it that he was not content merely to speak to the Chancellor, but wrote a letter to him about it, which is also on the public record. There was no way that he could express himself more strongly on the subject. He realised that it was a matter of political timing.

[Mr. Beith]

Another opportunity for an interest cut of that type is coming up—on the eve of the general election. To a politician in government, that would seem the most opportune moment to remove some of the fears about high interest rates, and therefore it is quite likely. What is more, a great many other people believe that the Government may behave in that way. In a footnote to its report, the Treasury Select Committee points out that lowering interest rates at the time of ERM entry might have contributed to a loss of credibility.

Industry needs larger interest rate cuts than these, but cuts which can be sustained, and that will not be the case unless they are accompanied by evidence of an anti-inflation policy. One of the most proven ways to contribute to that—I have argued this before in the House and I now find that the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) argued for that when he was in government—is to entrust an autonomous responsibility for price stability to the Bank of England.

The arguments against that are not economic but political. Those who argue against do not do so because they do not believe that it would have the effect that I describe, but because they want the freedom to put interest rates up or down in the light of considerations other than price stability. That is a dangerous power, which may occasionally be used beneficently but may often be used in circumstances which lead to further inflation later.

It would be desirable to keep sterling within the narrow bands of the exchange rate mechanism, and if that could be achieved, although it is a difficult process, clearly there will be more firmness in our commitment to our currency and its stability.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): That is a most interesting argument. However, were we not told in Brussels to reduce wage inflation to 2 or 3 per cent? Some of us pointed out that that would mean 3 or 4 million unemployed, but the attitude there was, so what? The Bank of England, in its superb Georgian offices in Threadneedle street, with magnificent Louis Quinze furniture, could dictate any level of interest rate. Is the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who is a Liberal, willing to allow the Bank of England to make 3 or 4 million people unemployed so that it can achieve a virtuous financial circle? He would not win many seats with that policy.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman has not come to terms with the fact that the tendency to inflation within the British economy is the underlying problem, and the fact that our currency does not repose on price stability. As long as politicians continue to play around with the currency to suit their own short-term political ends, the currency will not do so. Germany's success by adopting another method of dealing with the problem—autonomous responsibility for price stability—is on the record as one of the achievements of post-war Germany.

I shall now mention some of the consequences of recession for other aspects of Government policy. Our present recession might not have been so severe in industry if the Government had taken a number of other steps that we have advocated for years, such as training measures; correcting the mistakes of the 1984 corporation tax reforms, which hit companies especially hard in times of high inflation; and legislation to counter late payment of bills, especially by large institutions, which has made the cash flow problems of small and medium-sized firms worse. I know that some Conservative Back Benchers have been sympathetic to the latter and that a Bill was brought in to deal with it.

Other steps would be to attack monopolies more vigorously to ensure that prices are driven as low as possible by competition, and to reduce the burden of employers' national insurance contributions, which would be a less inflationary type of tax cut than those that the Government have made in the past. As well as those steps, which might have helped industry, key investment decisions need to be taken. At the time of the autumn statement, the wrong decisions were taken—and they will not be changed now because of the curious practice that we operate in this country where we consider public expenditure at one end of the year and raising the money for it halfway through the year. Governments seem unable to relate the two.

Any Government could reasonably point out that the Gulf crisis has changed calculations and has to be taken into consideration, but it need not stop essential investment—indeed, it must not. The costs of the Gulf war, serious though they are, are containable, and other countries are contributing to them to a significant extent. The costs are not on a scale which ought to lead to the abandonment of other important spending. I was a little worried that the Chief Secretary, when he appeared before our Committee, gave some signs that savings would be sought in some areas to meet some of the increases that will arise because of the cost of the Gulf crisis.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: I am a little concerned about the time that I have taken, and I want to keep close to Mr. Speaker's injunction.

Other key elements of investment need to be increased at this time if we are to get out of recession. Training is one area where the Government have made the greatest public spending mistakes of the autumn statement. The training budget has decreased every year since 1987-88 and continues to decrease. It has decreased in real terms year after year, and further cuts are planned during the next three years, supposedly on the ground that unemployment was decreasing, which is no longer the case. However, training is not about employment, but about having a more skilled work force, and we need more investment in training if we are to acquire the skills to get us out of recession.

The Department of Trade and Industry has gone down sharply and regularly. Regional aid to industry will have been cut by £65 million in the years up to 1994 and is virtually disappearing at a time when regions will start to feel the real impact of the recession. Funds for collaborative research have been cut by £38 million in 1991-92, a cut of about 35 per cent.

Essential investment in transport has been ignored, especially rail links to the channel tunnel. We have not tackled such links in the way that the French have, and there will be serious delays in linking the north of England by through freight and passenger trains to continental Europe.

Wisely used, public spending is sensible in a recession, as it is a less inflationary way to provide stimulus to the economy. If it is targeted towards those areas of investment which can make industry more competitive, it is a sensible direction in which to travel.

The Government have had some remarkable opportunities. They have had more than 10 years in power; they have enjoyed substantial majorities in the House of Commons; they have had the revenues resulting from North sea oil and from privatisation. Yet they have not got rid of inflation, they are presiding over a recession, and they are trapped in a high-interest-rate policy that is the result of their own past mistakes. What a record!

5.39 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): In the characteristically witty speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), Conservative Members could see very clearly the extent to which Labour—throughout its long and distinguished history as a political party—has nourished a pious aspiration for cheap money. That aspiration is most commonly associated with Hugh Dalton, but it has been felt by many other Labour party figures. In office, however, Labour has always seen such aspirations end in tears—and often in devaluation. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech reminded me forcefully of that.

It is at times such as this that the supporters of Government economic policy need to stand up and be counted, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) has already demonstrated. I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who said in the House on his return from the European Council just before Christmas:

"the purpose of Government economic policy is to bring down the rate of inflation, not to replace inflation today with inflation tomorrow by a premature and unwise movement on interest rates."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1990; Vol. 183, c. 166.]

That is the critical difference between Government and Opposition. Conservative Members do not believe in premature and risky reductions in interest rates, whereas I have a feeling that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, were he ever to become Chancellor, would run exactly that risk.

This is the second significant debate on the economy to be held in the House since my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took up his new post. It is still quite difficult for many of us—both in the House and outside, in the media and the markets—to come fully to terms with the new context of economic policy represented by our membership of the exchange rate mechanism. Although everyone professes to see in it either a panacea or a bogey, according to taste, I am not sure that everyone has fully understood the implications and, in particular, the constraints of that policy. Those constraints cannot be stressed too often or too strongly.

ERM entry has put this country firmly back on to an exchange rate standard of monetary policy, which obliges us first to control our costs—if we want to be competitive in the world economy—and secondly, to build sufficient confidence in the conduct of our monetary and fiscal policy, over a period of years, to reassure the financial markets of our determination to squeeze inflation out of the economy.

We must provide that much more reassurance than some other Governments, because Britain's track record over far too many years—decades, indeed—is one of not being as serious about inflation as we should have been. A premium is built into our interest rates, at any level, unless and until we derive the real benefits that can flow from long-term ERM membership.

We have already begun to achieve some success in our anti-inflationary endeavours: 'headline inflation' has stopped rising, and now looks set to fall when the figures are published later this week. I suspect that will apply to subsequent figures as well. If we stick to our current prudent approach, which necessarily involves validating rather than seeking to lead market sentiment, it will be possible to reduce interest rates further, as and when there is clear evidence of falling inflation.

Evidence of the growth of market understanding seems already to have crept into the lower forward interest rates in the City, which were already on offer before today, and the slight strengthening of the pound against the deutschmark which followed today's interest rate decision. The Government are involved in, and must stick to, the patient building of market credibility for our monetary policy—and a new policy at that.

It took the French authorities several years to achieve the same result, and to arrive at an inflation rate as low as, or lower than, that of the Germans. It need not take us as long—provided that my hon. Friends do not clamour for premature interest rate cuts, provided that the Government do not follow Labour policy by cutting rates, putting up taxation and introducing credit controls, which we heard about today, and provided that industry and commerce, and all pay bargainers, get a grip on all their costs. That means principally labour = costs.

It is worth remembering that employers and unions can limit some of the pain of bankruptcies and rising unemployment by reducing their labour costs to what is required for purposes of international competitiveness. That is true even for industries that are not exposed to international competition. The French did precisely that in the middle and late 1980s, once they saw the light and understood the new framework, and we must do the same in the 1990s and beyond.

Ms. Abbott: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman repeating the formula that businesses can avoid bankruptcies by cutting their labour costs. Can he tell me how many firms in the south-east, at a time of skill shortages, can continue to attract the skilled labour they need, while cutting wages as he suggests?

Mr. Forman: There are two ways of attracting the necessary skilled workers. One is to buy them in; the other is to "grow" them within the business itself. Through the training enterprise councils and by other methods, we are trying to encourage employers to develop skills within their own firms and factories.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forman: No; I am sorry.

Even the suspicion that we might leave the exchange rate mechanism, or seek an early opportunity to devalue in the context of an overall realignment of the ERM

[Mr. Forman]

currencies, would send all the wrong signals to the markets in the present conditions, and would set back the anti-inflationary progress that we have already made.

On one point—and one point only—I agree with what Professor Congdon and the others said in their notorious letter to *The Times*, published this morning. They said:

"Credibility would . . . be enhanced by . . . a sustainable monetary discipline".

I agree with that. What was wrong with their analysis—and one of the signatories, Professor Walters, has always been wrong, in my view—was the assumption that such anti-inflation credibility can be established by illusory monetary autonomy in a world of global capital markets. The days of national monetary autonomy are firmly over.

The important feature of the Government's present economic policy is the fact that they have recognised and acted on the economic realities of the modern world, and are working with the grain of market forces—whether in relation to short-term monetary policy, or in relation to the proposals for the hard ecu. We are already reaping considerable benefits from that responsible approach to our new economic policy within the ERM framework.

Let us consider the compelling evidence about inward investment, which comes to Britain only on two important basic assumptions—first, that we remain a core player in the European Community, and, secondly, that we pursue a credible monetary policy within the new ERM conditions. The figures are striking. According to an article in *The Independent on Sunday*, Britain is now enjoying some two fifths of inward and overseas investment by European Community nations in the Community. It is receiving two thirds of American investment in the Community, and two fifths of Japanese investment. Those are significant proportions, way beyond those achieved by our serious competitors; and that is happening only because of the confidence in Britain that has been instilled by the credibility of our new approach to monetary policy.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The figures from *The Independent on Sunday* that the hon. Gentleman has quoted are absolutely correct. They were based on the OECD report, and showed that Britain was receiving a substantial part of both Japanese and American investment in Europe as a whole.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware, however, that the figures quoted in the OECD report relate entirely to the period before we joined the ERM, when it was national policy—as represented by the then Prime Minister—that we should not join, or, at least, should not do so at early date? What conclusion does the hon. Gentleman draw from that?

Mr. Forman: The conclusion that I draw is that people were investing in this country because they had confidence in the two premises that I have mentioned—first, that we would remain a core player within the Community, and, secondly, that we would pursue a responsible monetary policy. The ERM decision gives us a better chance of doing that for the reasons I have elaborated about generating market confidence and market credibility. So it is an additional reason rather than the sole reason why it is necessary for us to adhere to those disciplines.

I shall cite two further pieces of evidence in support of my general argument. First, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, a one point move in overall labour costs is perhaps two or three times as significant to British industry and commerce as a one point move in short-term interest rates and that applies in either direction. Secondly, the volume of mobile money being moved around the world today is probably about 20 times more significant than that which is used to finance world trade. Again, we have to take account of the new realities. No monetary institution, not even the federal reserve in the United States of America or the Bundesbank in Germany now has complete monetary autonomy in modern conditions, and that must inform our monetary policy.

Therefore, the Government are right to buttress their monetary policy with a cautious fiscal policy, which ought to be achieved at the present stage of the economic cycle more by overall public expenditure control than by tax increases, disguised or otherwise. I hope that that lesson is not lost on my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his preparations for the Budget.

In the present circumstances, in spite of the cost of the Gulf war—in some ways we are almost in danger of making a profit, thanks to the strong and sensible efforts of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary—the Government can afford to take the strain of any unavoidable public spending increases in a limited extra increase in public borrowing rather than an increase in taxation. Such an approach would be readily financeable in current market conditions and at current rates of interest and could become even easier for us, once the German rates have peaked, which I believe that they will shortly, and once Spanish interest rates come down giving us more leeway within the ERM.

The policy will work as intended, provided that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is not tempted to go in for any fiscal fine tuning, which does not really work in current economic conditions, particularly in an economy of £600 billion within a huge global economy in which we represent only about 7 per cent. of world trade. It will work provided that my right hon. Friend sticks to his guns and steadily builds market credibility for his new policy. In that way we shall see headline inflation tumble later in the year—I am confident of that—and interest rates can then safely be reduced in the wake of better inflation figures. The balance of payments will continue to improve and we shall have laid a firm basis for continuing prosperity and success in the 1990s.

5.52 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): As a member of the Treasury Select Committee, I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) for his excellent chairmanship of that Committee. The quality of the Committee is matched only by its diversity and I hope that I will not be misunderstood if I say that it occasionally needs rather careful and skilful handling. The right hon. Member for Worthing has always provided the necessary leadership, and I salute him for it.

This year we have produced a particularly valuable report on the autumn statement. In fact, I think that in some ways it is rather more valuable than the autumn statement itself, since the problem with the autumn

statement is that it was out of date by the time it was published. The main flaw was its gross under-estimation of the extent of the recession.

On 8 November, when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer—now the Prime Minister—introduced the autumn statement, he talked complacently about a period of what he called "weak activity". He chided my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) for his allegedly alarmist talk about a recession. However, as the Chancellor spoke, the economy, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East told him at the time, was already in the grip of a fierce recession. Sadly, as we point out in our report and as the right hon. Member for Worthing mentioned, that recession is likely to be much deeper and longer than the Treasury forecast in the autumn statement.

We are now in the second most severe recession experienced by the country since the 1930s and it could turn out to be the most severe. The influential economic commentator, Gavyn Davies, director of Goldman Sachs and economic adviser to the Treasury Select Committee, has pointed out that most of the indicators in the latest Confederation of British Industry survey are worse than they were at the same stage of the 1980 recession. The CBI survey shows that manufacturing output is falling rapidly, investment is declining sharply and unemployment is likely to rise even faster than is predicted by the most pessimistic accounts.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if Conservative Members were interested in unemployment, those who have already spoken or intervened would have mentioned the increase in unemployment benefit claimants in their constituencies in the past nine months? The hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), who is still in his seat, would know that there has been a 72 per cent. increase in claimants in his constituency. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) would know that there has been a 32 per cent. increase in his constituency. The Minister——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) is not making a speech; she is intervening in the speech of the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice).

Ms. Mowlam: I accept that. However, the Minister should know that there has been a 32 per cent. increase in claimants in his constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is appalling that Conservative Members have not mentioned that?

Mr. Radice: I agree with my hon. Friend. What is interesting about the recession is that, in contrast to 1980-81, when the recession began in the manufacturing sector, this recession began in the housing market and spread to the service sector in the high street. Now it is severely affecting the manufacturing sector as well. Also, in 1980-81 the recession began in the southern part of the country.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) pointed out, it is a cause for concern that Conservative Members have not mentioned the unemployment in their own constituencies, considering how fast it has been rising. My hon. Friend will know that the rash of recent bankruptcies suggests that, after a six-months time lag, the recession is now hitting the north with equal severity. As a northern Member of Parliament, I find it a tragedy that, after all that has been done in the north and all its efforts to adapt its economy, it should be suffering once again from recession. My hon. Friends who represent northern constituencies also recognise that.

The recession will be longer and deeper than the Government were telling us three months ago, and it is hitting every part of industry and every region. The responsibility for the recession lies fairly and squarely at the door of the Government. It is not caused by world recession. Although there is a slowdown on the north American continent, the two most successful economies in the world—Germany and Japan—are still growing steadily. Germany has a predicted growth rate of 5 per cent. in the coming year and Japan has a predicted growth rate of between 2·5 per cent. and 3 per cent. That is hardly a recession, so we cannot blame the rest of the world for ours.

Nor is it caused by the Gulf war. At a hearing on the cost and economic consequences of the Gulf war, the Chief Secretary rightly told the Treasury Select Committee that the Government were not

"seeking to hide behind the war as an excuse for any other difficulties we face."

It is a pity that the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not heed the Chief Secretary's wise words.

The truth is that we are in a recession because of the mess that the Government have made of the economy since 1987. As the Select Committee pointed out at the time, the Government, by a reckless policy of credit deregulation, tax cuts and monetary expansion, allowed the economy to get out of balance in the first half of 1988. They should have been in a position then to use credit controls, fiscal policy and exchange rate policy to bring the economy back under control. Instead, they stuck—in some ways they did not have many alternatives since they had already got rid of credit controls—to the one-club policy of high interest rates.

As I said in a speech in last year's Budget debate, relying on interest rates as a key lever is likely to be unpredictable and disruptive. I must quote at this point Professor Paish's classic description:

"It is like pulling a brick across a table top with a piece of elastic: nothing happens for ages, and then the brick hits you in the eye."

A long period of high interest rates imposed by the Government has given the British economy a massive black eye.

The question facing the House is what the Government should do to get the country out of the mire in which they have dropped us. A package of measures is required; the first is to reduce interest rates. Everyone welcomes the half per cent. reduction announced today, but that is only a modest beginning. There is no doubt that interest rates will need to come down—*[Interruption.]* If the Chief Secretary will listen for a moment, I have some good advice for him. Interest rates need to come down by at least 2 to 3 per cent. as soon as possible.

I recognise that ERM membership imposes a restriction on interest rate policy. That is the issue raised in *The Times* today, and it has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) in his stimulating series of speeches; it is also discussed fully in the Select Committee report. I advise those of my hon. Friends who have not read that report to have a look at it.

[Mr. Radice]

I was a strong supporter of British entry of the ERM because it brings more stable exchange rates. Our experience outside it as compared with exchange rates inside it shows that clearly. In the medium term, the ERM can lead to a reduction in interest rates, and I note that interest rates are lower inside it than were ours outside it. It is also a useful counter-inflationary discipline: inflation is lower inside the ERM than was ours outside it.

It is not possible to blame the ERM for the current recession. Unemployment started to rise in April 1990 and we did not enter the ERM until October——

Mr. Shore: Since when, it has deepened.

Mr. Radice: My right hon. Friend will forgive me if I complete my argument. As I said at the time of our entry, we entered at the wrong time, for the wrong reason and at the wrong rate. We entered partly for political reasons, before the Tory party conference, just as today, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) pointed out, we had an interest rate reduction shortly before this debate.

A problem has been created by the former Chancellor's handling of our entry. The weakness of sterling inside the ERM has made it more difficult to obtain the reductions in interest rates that are so vital for domestic reasons. The first answer to that is to manoeuvre such reductions and in a way that is precisely what the present Chancellor has already done. At least a 1 per cent. interest rate reduction has already been largely discounted by the markets, as shown by the fact that sterling strengthened against the deutschmark on the foreign markets today.

Secondly, given that we have joined the ERM, it would be wrong to devalue unilaterally—that would send all the wrong signals. However, there is a stronger case for a deutschmark revaluation within the ERM—*[Laughter.]* That has been advocated by the Bundesbank; indeed, it is being advocated by it at this very moment. That would create a space for a general realignment.

I make a prediction: within the coming year there will be a general realignment of exchange rates in the ERM, and it will be led by a revaluation of the deutschmark.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): May I offer the hon. Gentleman some advice? If he really believes that a significant cut in interest rates is vital for the British economy now, does he think that possible without a realignment? If it is not, will he swallow his pride and support a realignment?

Mr. Radice: I have just said that I think that there is a stronger case for a realignment inside the ERM, led by a deutschmark revaluation.

Thirdly, we must reintroduce some form of credit controls. The minimum reserve asset ratios that operate in France and Germany should operate here, too.

Lastly, there should be what the Treasury calls greater fiscal activism, as we argue in the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report. The Government's refusal since 1980 to use fiscal policy counter-cyclically has been bad for the British economy. I welcome the policy announced by the Government on automatic stabilisers, but there is room for sensible investment of public money in incentives for industry, as argued by my colleagues on the Front Bench, in employment creation—because we need measures against unemployment—and in training and regional policy.

Mr. Shore *rose*——

Mr. Radice: I have only four minutes, and to give way now would be unfair to myself. I have already given way twice.

The use of these instruments in the way that I have described would restore some measure of flexibility and credibility to economic management, which has had to rely exclusively on interest rates. The Government have saddled themselves with a policy of economic management which is followed by no other country in Europe. We do not need to do that; we need more flexible economic management policy.

It is essential to tackle the recession and to bring the economy back into balance, and short-term economic management has an important role in that. But we must also operate in the longer term on the supply side of the economy. That is not merely a matter, as Conservative Members seem to think, of liberalising markets; it is equally a question of investing in the factors of supply. We need to invest in skills. It is good that the Prime Minister has at last realised the importance of education and training, but it is a bit late—the dying gasp of a dying Government. Investment in technology, in infrastructure and in transport is also vital for the economy.

By bringing the economy back into balance and by investing in the supply side we should help to prepare the economy for the certain prospect of the single market, for which we are badly prepared, because we are going into it at the wrong time for our economy. It would also prepare us for the possibility of a single currency by the end of the century. I agree with my hon. Friends who are against the idea of a single currency that we must bring about a transformation of the economy if we are not to suffer as a consequence.

The charge against the Government is that, like the Tory Governments in the 1930s and 1950s, they have failed to prepare the country for the challenges that lie ahead. In the coming months, the Labour party will press that important charge in the House and in the country. I predict that the verdict of the voters will be that the Government are guilty as charged.

6.9 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): We should all congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) on being a master at avoiding answering questions. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) pointed out, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was tackled about interest rate reductions and about whether there should be a realignment, he did not answer the question.

There is far too much doom and gloom in reference to our economy. Comparisons are made between the 1930s and the 1980s, but one never hears the critics of our economic policy talk about the strength of our economy since 1979. The growth in output per worker in Britain is the highest in Europe—indeed, it is higher than in any other industrial country. Twenty-seven of the 50 top performing companies in the world originate in the United Kingdom. Almost 400,000 new businesses have been created.

Although they may be profitable, many small businesses have cash flow problems. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to make local authorities and departments pay their debts within 28 or 31 days, or whatever period is decided upon. Many small businesses go into receivership because they cannot get money. Serious thought should be given to providing for mandatory interest after there have been outstanding debts for a certain period. That would help the cash flow. I remind my right hon. and learned Friend that if one of us owes Customs and Excise money on VAT or owes income tax to the Inland Revenue, those departments are quick to start charging interest, whether or not there is a genuine excuse.

The Government must also review the draconian fines imposed on some VAT payers. I assure my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary that I in no way support or give succour to businesses that try to avoid paying VAT, but many small employers depend on someone else looking after the books. Genuine mistakes may be made. Customs and Excise and the VAT tribunals should have the discretion to decide that a business that has innocently not paid VAT should not suffer a draconian fine.

The other day, I heard about a company which had an addition error of £900,000 in its sales. That error would have been spotted under the company's normal checking procedure, but Customs and Excise not only took the tax on the £900,000 but imposed a fine of £272,000. That was a draconian action. I do not know whether Customs and Excise is as keen to pay interest to someone who overpays VAT.

Like other hon. Members, I welcome the 0·5 per cent. reduction in interest rates. After the stock market crash in 1987, the pundits, economists and all the political parties said, "We must reduce interest rates because there will be a world recession. The only way to avoid a recurrence of the 1930s recession is to reduce interest rates." Interest rates were reduced, but, with hindsight, that was a mistake. The former Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), openly admitted that. At the time, however, everyone was clamouring for an interest rate reduction. The same scenario applies today —people, including the Opposition, are clamouring for a reduction. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is taking things gently and being cautious.

The Government have always said that, as inflation comes down, interest rates will come down. A 0·5 per cent. reduction in interest rates is a step in the right direction. Although it will not make much practical difference in the immediate future, it shows that the Government are standing by their pledge that when inflation comes down, interest rates will, too. Business men can take comfort from the fact that this is the first step towards reasonable interest rates.

The retail prices index will be published on Friday—apparently, the Government have the figures now. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor would not have reduced interest rates by 0·5 per cent., or by anything at all, if they thought that Friday's figures showed that inflation was worse than 9·3 per cent. I am sure that the figures will be satisfactory.

Ms. Mowlam: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Clark: I am sorry, but I cannot give way in a 10-minute speech.

We must not jeopardise the future by reducing interest rates too quickly. We went down that road in 1987-88. Of course, events in the Gulf will put over public expenditure figures out, although not be a great deal because of the contributions from the Kuwaitis, Saudi Arabians and Germans. I am sure that the House is delighted at the close contact and co-operation between Chancellor Kohl of Germany and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. We can build on that co-operation. It was interesting to read that Chancellor Kohl gave a sympathetic hearing to the hard ecu suggestion made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister some time ago.

It would be a mistake to rush precipitately into the narrow bands of ERM. We must bring inflation well down before doing so. If we move too quickly, realignment may be forced upon us. That would bring inflationary pressures, because imports would cost more. We should stay on course. We will ride out the recession. The United Kingdom economy is in much better shape than it has been for many years—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The Opposition should be aware of the strength of the economy. Our national debt has been reduced by £26 billion over the past three years, which must be a good thing. The average family's standard of living has improved. Two thirds of people own the houses in which they live.

We are in a recession, but we are starting from a higher level of prosperity than in the past. We are not starting at the bottom. In the 1970s and the 1980s, we were at the bottom of the international league. Now we are near the top. I am sometimes astounded by Opposition Members. They seem to take delight in any economic difficulty that we have. They jump gleefully on any bad news and say that the Government's economic policy——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

6.20 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I listened with interest, as did my colleagues, as the Chancellor talked defensively, but still rather lightly, about the current recession. People call it "Mr. Major's recession", as he was at the Treasury for almost the entire period of its gestation—a major recession, courtesy of Mr. Major.

I noted how the Chancellor talked about the ballooning of public and private debt, as though it were simply a series of coincidental individual decisions, rather than, as was the case, a response to, and the result of, Government policies—notably, deregulation of financial services, changes in the arrangements for mortgage tax relief, and tax cuts. I must be one of hundreds of Members of the House with a very healthy bank overdraft, and in the past year not a day has gone past without an expensive leaflet urging me to borrow more coming through my door. That is the climate that the Government have created. The Thatcher boom was nothing more than a 20th-century south sea bubble.

I listened, perhaps most sadly of all, as the Chancellor said that the present recession was a price well worth paying. Right hon. and hon. Members on the Treasury Bench can say that this recession is a price well worth paying—they, in their personal lives and circumstances, are not paying it. But let them tell my constituents in Hackney that this recession is a price worth paying. Let

[Ms. Diane Abbott]

them say the same thing to the new businesses in Hackney that were launched on the crest of the new enterprise bubble in the latter years of the 1980s.

Many of those businesses, launched by members of the minorities anxious to better themselves by doing what the Government had told them to do—get into the enterprise culture—are now in a very different position. Let the Government talk to people who are surrounded by the ruins of their business endeavours and strangled by high interest rates. Let them talk to old-established businesses in London—particularly businesses in the construction industry—and to people in professions related to the property market. Let them hear those people say that, unless interest rates come down perceptibly in the next six months, they face ruin.

Let the Government tell young people in Hackney who will leave school this summer, and who face a complete drying-up of clerical jobs in the City and in the west end, that this has all been a price worth paying. Let them tell mortgage payers, who face the crippling burden of some of the steepest payments in the country, and consequent repossession or enforced sale, that their misery is a price worth paying. Above all, let them look at the people who have suffered the personal misery and financial disaster of bankruptcies. Let them tell the victims of the rising level of bankruptcies in the past few months that the current recession is a price worth paying.

The Chancellor accused some people of blaming the EMS for the recession. In fact, no one does that—not even the more rabid anti-Europeans on his Benches. It is clear that joining the EMS at too high a level was a blow to industry. Like the new Chief Secretary, I am not an economist, but it is clear that membership of the EMS means that for external exchange rate purposes we have to maintain interest rates that are much too high for the internal domestic purpose of combating recession.

I say a few words about economic and monetary union. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has just returned from Brussels, where it had a series of very interesting meetings with members of the Commission, —off the record, of course. To anyone who talks to members of the Commission it is quite clear that the Government are sidling towards economic and monetary union. For fear of upsetting some of their more excitable supporters, they will not admit it, but it is the fixed opinion of leading members of the European Commission that Europe will have a single currency by the year 2000. No one can have any doubt that economic and monetary union is a moving train and that we are on it.

Without wishing to intrude on private sorrow, I shall say a few words in passing about the hard ecu, of which we have heard so much. It is a tragic tale, but still the Chancellor clutches the hard ecu to his bosom like a mother trying to will a stillborn child to life. In Brussels we found that the hard ecu, despite the Chancellor's claim that it had been greeted with rapturous acclaim in the chancelleries of Europe, is dead in the water. Central bank governors have rejected it, and our European partners have rejected it. There is absolutely no support for a 13th currency.

Of course, the hard ecu was greeted respectfully as a step up from the "Up yours, Delors" style of diplomacy previously favoured by the British Government. Ministers have claimed that the Spanish proposal is very similar to the hard ecu, but in fact it is quite different. The hard ecu is acceptable only as a transitional arrangement—if it is acceptable at all. It is not, as Mr. Major has apparently persuaded his more gullible right-wingers, an alternative to the single currency. The hard ecu, as a practical alternative to the single currency, is dead. The problem is that the Government appear to be taking on all the difficulties of European monetary union but none of its benefits and opportunities.

The Government talk about lowering interest rates. They say that lower interest rates are unthinkable within the European system. The fact is that, when the French joined the EMS, they realigned within a very short period. There is no reason why we should not have a realignment. I put it to the Chief Secretary that businesses and the mortgage-paying public are crying out for it. Furthermore, within Europe, the Government, as part of their policy, are taking on the difficulties but are not grasping the opportunities. They are blocking the effective distribution of regional aid. They are preventing local authorities from getting money from Europe for small businesses. Above all, they are fighting the social charter.

Everyone in Europe, apart from the British Government, accepts that a single market will not have the support of ordinary people if it is seen just as a vehicle for increasing the market for big business. The Government have fought a national minimum wage, protection for part-time workers, parental leave and worker representation. Europe seems to want to burden the British Government with all the difficulties of European monetary union but to deny them all the positive aspects.

I return to Mr. Major's recession——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister.

Ms. Abbott: —the Prime Minister's recession. First, we were told that there were problems of definition. Then we were told that the recession would be short and shallow. Now, as all honest Members must admit, the economy is in free fall towards a slump.

I can do no better than quote the Treasury Select Committee's report on the autumn statement:

> "Taking all factors into account, we conclude that the recession is likely to be deeper and longer in duration than the Treasury forecast."

That was true when we drafted the report; it is even more true now. The recession will be much deeper and much longer than the Government admit. Right hon. and hon. Members on the Treasury Bench will not pay the human cost of this slump, but we in the Opposition believe that, inexorably, between now and July 1992, they will pay the political price of the Government-manufactured recession.

6.28 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I am pleased that, after considerable delay and pain, the Government's anti-inflation policy is now working. It has taken a long time to show through, but on an analysis of the past three months' inflation figures—I appreciate the danger of doing that in light of the experience of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey)—the figure amounts to only 1·9 per cent.

Today's cut in interest rates is welcome, but it is smaller than many hon. Members would have liked. To bring inflation down, the Government had to reduce the

overheating in the economy—which, I hesitate to say, was grossly underestimated by the Treasury in 1987-88—through the use of high interest rates.

Interest rates have been high now for well over 18 months. It is certainly the longest period of high interest rates that I can remember. High interest rates have taken time to work, but they are working now with a vengeance—so much so that the Treasury's forecast of a shallow recession is, as the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) said, proving to be far too optimistic. If action is not taken soon, I foresee disaster on the horizon. There is a danger that the recession could turn into a real slump.

I was a strong supporter of the monetary policy of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) and it was a tragedy that he did not stick to it. From a monetarist point of view, all the indicators are screaming for an easing of monetary policy and a significant reduction in interest rates. If inflation comes down, but interest rates do not come down as quickly, there will be a tightening of the monetary stance at the very time that it needs to be slackened.

Unemployment is rising and will soon be more than 2 million. The savings rate is once again rising and is most satisfactory. The froth has come out of the housing market and house prices are flat, or in many places are still falling. Retail trade is falling and company liquidity is under severe pressure. Industrial production is falling and in some industries demand is dropping through the floor. At long last, private sector wage settlements are coming down and it is a great pity that they are not following suit in the public sector.

Bankruptcies and closures are increasing by the week. The growth of money supply is falling; seasonally adjusted for the last quarter it was only 0·8 per cent. The balance of payments deficit is also coming down. Why are interest rates so high? The answer is the exchange rate mechanism.

On 12 Decembr, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

> "There can be no question of a reduction in interest rates that is not fully justified by our position in the ERM. That will be the case however strong is the pressure for lower interest rates based on other indicators."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 966.]

That is a chilling statement. The logic is that if to maintain our position in the ERM we needed to raise interest rates, the Chancellor would not flinch from doing that. I believe that that would be disastrous at this stage.

We are now paying the penalty for joining the exchange rate mechanism and for changing interest rates from being an instrument of monetary policy to being an instrument of exchange rate policy. If that policy continues unchanged, the price that we shall have to pay will be a recession that is deeper than the 1980-81 recession and one that will last longer. If that is allowed to happen, the damage to our economy and to the political fortunes of the Conservative party would be immense.

This recession will be worse than that in 1980-81 because at that time much of the unemployment was due to the removal of overmanning and restrictive practices. Many of the firms that went out of business then were inefficient, old-fashioned, badly managed and, in some cases, were driven into the ground by the trade unions. This time, the inefficient, slimmed-down firms with good union relations are going to the wall. On this occasion, the recession is not restricted to manufacturing industry. It has affected the south and also service industries—the industries that we have done so much to encourage.

There have been job losses and closures in advertising and public relations and even redundancies in the law, banking and estate agencies. Like other hon. Members, I see evidence of the recession in my area. In the past week, 612 jobs were lost in three firms in and around Hull. No doubt some of those firms faced the difficulty of selling into a $2-for-the-pound American market.

Today we have a combination of high interest rates, collapsing demand and the approximate $2 exchange rate. That is causing great difficulties for many companies. I am worried about the effect that that combination of factors is having on many small and medium-sized firms. No Government have done as much for the small business sector as this Government and no one has done more to recreate the enterp. se culture than my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), the former Prime Minister. However, many small and medium-sized businesses are struggling and going to the wall. Some have already gone out of business.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Townend: No, I only have 10 minutes in which to make my speech.

Unless we act now, more businesses will go to the wall and much of the enterprise culture that we have so painstakingly built up over the past 10 years will be lost, perhaps never to return. How right was our former Prime Minister to oppose entry into the ERM.

If we do not act now, at worst we might face a situation similar to when we joined the gold standard before the second world war. We need interest rates to come down quickly, not by 0·5 per cent., but by 2 or 3 per cent. I accept that that will be a difficult decision, but such action is clearly not possible if we maintain our position in the ERM. I should like us to leave the ERM as I believe in floating rates, but I accept that that may be politically impossible. Therefore, there must be a realignment within the ERM.

I challenge those who say that the market would lose confidence in Britain. The markets will lose confidence in Britain if we let a large section of our industry and business go into liquidation. I accept the argument that lower interest rates would reduce the rate at which inflation will decrease. However, the figures that I have quoted show that the rate of inflation is dropping so quickly that perhaps a slower rate might be better. We are now paying for the desire of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby to see sterling fixed to the deutschmark.

The current recession has been made worse by the Gulf war, which has had a significant effect on service industries, tourism, airlines, travel and hotels. It is now gathering speed so quickly that, even if interest rates were cut by 2 or 3 per cent. in the near future, the recession would continue to increase for some months before there was an upturn and businesses would continue to fold. There would not be an upturn before the end of the year.

I do not have time on my side, and as a country we do not have time on our side. Industries cannot afford to have the Government wait, and similarly the Conservative party cannot afford to have the Government make the ERM the overriding factor of economic policy. My right

[Mr. Townend]

hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is a sensitive man. He inherited our membership of the ERM. He appreciates, even though some of the Treasury mandarins do not, the depth of the recession. He appreciates the pain that small businesses in his constituency are suffering. I know that he wants to do the right thing and I beg him not to be deterred by what our European partners might think and either come out of the ERM or opt for realignment.

Having seen how membership of the ERM has placed our economy in a straitjacket, having seen how disunited Europe has been over the Gulf and how slow Europe has been to give adequate support to Great Britain and the United States, I believe that we certainly should not put our economy and industry at risk on the altar of being good Europeans.

6.38 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The Chancellor said earlier that the effects of the recession were exaggerated. Last Thursday, in my constituency, Sooner Foods shed 400 jobs. Last Friday, in Brigg, British Sugar announced that it was closing its factory, with the loss of more than 100 full-time jobs and more than 200 seasonal jobs. This morning, the major employer in my constituency, British Steel, announced that 850 jobs are to go. That amounts to more than 1,400 job losses in the area in less than a week. I do not think that that exaggerates the scale of the recession. It is a recession for which the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Government must take responsibility because of their economic mismanagement and their sledgehammer approach to the economy.

Each of those three firms was successful, had good management, and worked with the unions to try to minimise the human effects of those job losses. Nevertheless, the root of their problem is the fall in demand through recession, cripplingly high interest rates, and the exchange rate mechanism. The Government entered the ERM at the wrong time for the wrong reasons.

Ms. Abbott: And at the wrong rate.

Mr. Morley: It was certainly at the wrong rate. That has added to the detrimental effects on our manufacturing base.

It is amazing that the Government are more interested in giving tax cuts to the well-off than they are in building our training, investment and industrial base. It is amazing that the Government, who have had the benefit of North sea oil and the benefit of privatisation proceeds—although those assets were sold off on the cheap and below their real value—are in such an economic mess compared with our main industrial rivals. People in Glanford and Scunthorpe are paying the human cost of that neglect and mismanagement.

As has been pointed out, we need not only a cut in interest rates but a deep cut in interest rates, and not just one approach to controlling inflation but a much more sophisticated approach to controlling inflation. I fear that much of our economic base will never recover from the ravages that are being imposed on it by the Government's economic mismanagement.

6.41 pm

Mr. Nicholas Ridley (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): On 30 March 1981, 364 economists wrote to *The Times* and said:

"There is no basis in economic theory or supporting evidence for the Government's belief that by deflating demand they will bring inflation permanently under control and thereby induce an automatic recovery in output and employment."

On that occasion they were wrong. That statement was followed by seven years of low inflation and very high growth. This morning, six economists—many fewer—wrote to *The Times* and said that they feared that the depth of the recession would be deeper and longer than anybody expected and that an immediate cut in interest rates was required.

What is the difference between now and 10 years ago and the two circumstances in which the economists wrote to *The Times*? Both were periods in which inflation had to be killed, and I believe that both will successfully kill inflation. Both, of course, cause distress—for example, unemployment and bankruptcies—which is the miserable but necessary price of reducing inflation. The difference is that, in those days, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) was allowing the pound to go where it would, whereas the pound is now constrained in the exchange rate mechanism.

That brings me to the central questions that I hope that my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will think more deeply about, although they have already thought about them deeply. What is the objective of the squeeze? What do they seek to achieve by high interest rates? We cannot have two objectives, and we cannot have two priorities. There must be one top priority. As between the priorities—defeating inflation or maintaining a certain exchange rate—there must be a choice. I quote no less an expert authority or high priest of European monetarism than Karl Otto Pöhl, who said:

"Interest rates should be set according to domestic monetary conditions, and the exchange rate should be left to go where it will."

More recently, he said:

"In my view it would therefore be desirable to embody in the statute of a European central bank a clause to the effect that domestic stability must have priority over exchange rate stability."

I say amen to that. He put his finger on the defect in the exchange rate mechanism, although he is the high priest of that very mechanism.

How can one be a member of the exchange rate mechanism and yet give priority not to the mechanism but to domestic stability? I expect that Mr. Pöhl was referring to the management of some future European currency as against the dollar or the yen. I am sure that he would say that those are different economies with different problems, different states of development and different rates of growth and that, of course, one must have an exchange rate between them, but that must not be the priority.

Of course, within the ERM there are different economies, different rates of growth and different levles of productivity. Just as our economy is different from Germany's, so we are faced with the choice of whether to keep entirely to the German rate of progress by our relationship with the deutschmark in the ERM or to look after domestic monetary conditions instead. That has the unfortunate consequence as well of putting us into the

wrong parity against the dollar, which is not a member of the exchange rate mechanism; nevertheless, half our exports go to dollar countries.

Why is it that the people who criticised the Government in 1981 for their very tight monetary squeeze now support the exchange rate mechanism and the present maintenance of high interest rates, whereas nowadays those who supported the Government in 1981 are critical of the Government for their present severe squeeze? The answer is that those like myself who supported the Government in 1981 but are worried about the present situation put as our top priority the defeat of inflation and no more, whereas others of my right hon. and hon. Friends seem to put as their top objective the maintenance of some position in the ERM for primarily European foreign policy reasons and not for economic reasons. That shows how dangerous it can be to get one's priorities wrong.

The 0·5 per cent. cut in interest rates is welcome, but, as many have said, it is too little, too late. The Government have demonstrated that their objective is to do the least possible so as not to disturb the value of the pound in the ERM. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said, his primary objective is to do that. His primary objective should be to kill inflation, but not to have over-kill. Six of the best economists wote to *The Times* and we had 0·5 per cent. off interest rates, in which case, I shall encourage those six economists to write again on another three days. Three or four more such letters should get us to where we should probably be.

It is not necessary to follow inflation down with successive cuts in interest rates. If the money supply is too restricted and M0 is running at only 3 per cent., as I believe that it is, it is right to address the need to get the money supply right, not necessarily to tie it to some indicator such as the RPI, which is meaningless in this context. The RPI measures the inflation of the past 12 months, not the inflation of the hour or the day. Therefore, one is measuring something that is of no relevance to the current state of the economy. We should forget the idea of chasing inflation down with interest cuts. Inflation is coming down very fast indeed, although that will not show because we always have the baggage of the past 12 months within the index.

I urge the Government to use interest rates—if I may again quote Herr Pöhl—

"according to domestic monetary conditions".

I suspect that they never believed that the slump would be as bad as it is obviously going to be. The autumn statement itself said:

"GDP is expected to recover through 1991."

I do not think that GDP will recover through 1991 unless the Government are prepared to make that their main objective.

6.50 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It was a fascinating spectacle at the beginning of the debate watching the Conservative Benches fill with Members who wanted a little hope and good cheer from the Chancellor; they had hope in their eyes and were quietly humming to themselves

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom"

until the Chancellor began to speak. What did he offer them? Absolutely nothing. The only definite prospect he offered them in that long speech was that what goes down must come up, some time; we do not know where, we do not know when, we do not even know why.

That is the question. Why must what goes down come back up eventually? Why is it not possible that, on the contrary, we are locked into a downward spiral of more bankruptcies, more unemployment deflating demand and therefore leading to more bankruptcies and more unemployment—a process which goes on until it reaches a credit crunch in which banks and building societies begin to demand the return of assets which cannot be sold at prices justified by the borrowing, so increasing the burden of debt?

Far from recovering from the depression, which will be hard, severe and long, it is possible that we are on the brink of worse. Confidence, which has been buoyed up by the Government's hopes and by the 0·5 per cent. cut in interest rates, is poised on a knife edge. The stock market is buoyed by hopes—but hopes of what? Asset prices are kept up because no one dare pull the plug, but we are precious near pulling the plug. The foreign exchange rate, which has been very low against the deutschmark, may go down further, forcing an increase in interest rates. That is the knife edge on which we are balanced.

It is no use the Government exuding hope and good cheer without telling us that something will be done. We are in a uniquely disastrous position. The economy is not well prepared to face it. Industry has over-borrowed; everybody has over-borrowed. We have had the biggest increase in the borrowings-to-earnings ratio of any country in the advanced industrial world. The ratio is now among the highest, if not the highest. Therefore, we are perilously exposed to a credit crunch.

Our economic statistics are the worst of the Anglo-Saxon world which has been cited in defence of the proposition that the problem must have been caused externally. Although the United States is in difficulty, it is interesting that, because its exchange rate has come down, its exports are doing very well, thus offsetting the decline in the domestic market. That is not happening here. There is no way out through that channel.

We are in a worse mess than the Government are admitting, with no sign or glimmer of a recovery, or even an indication from the Government that they will help the recovery. In those circumstances, we have to ask what the role of the ERM is. The Chancellor gave the easy answer that the ERM did not cause the depression. Nobody said that. What ERM membership does is lock us into the depression and screw down the lid, by removing our ability to use the weapons which we have always had in the past to get us out of the depression. In the past, we had the ability to reduce interest rates to stimulate the economy and to relieve the pressures of debt. All that has gone.

We have abandoned control to Brussels. It is always a mistake to make an externally determined exchange rate, particularly an exchange rate determined by competitors who have a vested interest in seeing it overvalued, a central instrument of management. It is like trying to improve the weather by nailing the needle on the barometer: it cannot be done. It is an even bigger mistake to do that at a time when the cycles are out of kilter. The Chancellor said that Germany was still growing. That is true, but the Germans want to dampen that growth. They want an increase in interest rates. We need a reduction in interest rates, because our economy is so depressed.

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

It is impossible to merge the economic policies of two countries which are at different stages of a cycle and make the stronger one dominant, as has happened with the deutschmark. That is a mere mistake, but the absolutely daft decision of the Government was to go into the exchange rate mechanism at a rate which was grossly overvalued. It was up about 20 per cent. in real terms on the exchange rate at the end of 1986. Even if industry cut wages, it could not overcome that burden and become competitive. It is double-talk and nonsense to expect industry to hold wage increases. If wage rates were cut, industry would still not be competitive on the exchange rate as it was at the end of 1986.

We are overvalued. We are grotesquely overvalued against the dollar. The result will be decimation of our exports on the American market. We have already seen our manufacturing trade with the United States turn from a £1 billion surplus in 1986 to a £3 billion deficit last year. That turnround was caused entirely by exchange rate variations. The position will get worse. We will lose that market. We depend more than any other country in the Common Market on exports to America.

The Government have managed to get the balance of payments deficit down by deflating the economy, but that means that permafrost will be the permanent state of the economy. If that is the only way to rectify the balance of payments deficit, the Government have to keep deflation and they have to keep wage demands down. Otherwise, everything will take off again, particularly the balance of payments problem. The Government are telling us that we have a limitless future of permafrost depression and deflation.

The only way to cure the problem is to have a competitive exchange rate. After all, the exchange rate is only a market clearing mechanism. If we had a competitive exchange rate, we could balance our trade, which we are not doing. That in itself indicates that we are not competitive. With a competitive exchange rate, we would have full employment and a high and sustainable rate of growth. That should be the central measure of economic strategy.

Inflation is irrelevant. As the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) once pointed out, the only aim of economic policy is to make the country richer. That is what it is all about. It is not about making the country depressed, deflated, unemployed and bankrupt. That is not the measure of economic policy.

The only way to recovery is a competitive currency. We need that desperately. Exports as a share of GDP went down in the 1980s by about 3 per cent. Our industrial base has shrunk so far that it is barely viable. It must remain viable. The only way that we can recover from the balance of payments problem in the long term is to expand manufacturing industry. That means a competitive exchange rate and the ability to invest—both denied by the high interest rate policy. We are taking our front line troops—manufacturing industry—in the battle for survival against the rest of the advanced industrial world—it is a war we are engaged in—and shelling them, putting them out of work by high interest rates. That way lies disaster, a decline in which the country will be reduced to the poor periphery of a wealthier Europe. We will have a decline in tax revenues as corporation tax goes down, and a loss of capacity and jobs which will never come back. Our industrial base is already dangerously contracted. That way lies a graveyard.

The only way the Government will achieve lower inflation is by graveyard economics. That is what they are doing. They are putting people out of work, closing capacity and cutting investment. All that is happening now, just to keep us surviving. We shall end up with peace, the peace that passeth all understanding, the peace of the graveyard.

There are ways out. I do not have time to deal with them all, but we certainly need an expansionary Budget which borrows and spends on the essentials—on housing, on the shabby rundown public sector, on public transport and on all the things that need to be done. We need to control credit by requiring substantive reserve ratios from banks deposited with the Bank of England. We need—not now, but soon—an incomes policy. That is the only way we can expand and ensure that inflationary pressures do not choke off that expansion.

Above all, we need devaluation. What is wrong with letting the market decide the exchange rate? Why should we always think of devaluation as a moral crime? Why cannot the exchange rate be decided by the markets? On that basis, our exchange rate would be substantially—about 20 per cent.—lower. Why should sterling not be able to follow the dollar down as it would have done outside the exchange rate mechanism?

Now that we are within the exchange rate mechanism, why should we not be able to say that we are experiencing teething troubles and admit that we have made a mistake? Everyone else had a chance to make substantial adjustments to their exchange rates initially; why cannot we do so? Why should we adhere to the Government policy when all that they have said today is that at this stage in the economic war we need a futile gesture? They are giving us more closures, redundancies, unemployment and loss of capacity and are whittling down our ability to survive and pay our way in the world just to support their fanatic enthusiasm for deflationary economics and the exchange rate mechanism.

7 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I shall say only a few words, because many hon. Members want to speak in the debate and there is always a danger that we shall repeat each other.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) should remember the well-known Scottish saying that fine words butter no parsnips. It is easy for those who are in Opposition or are Back-Bench Members of Parliament to give advice or consent, because they do not have to govern. It is with that genuine sense of humility that I shall give a few words about the problems facing manufacturing industry.

Various Chancellors during the past 11 years have said that I am a Brummie and talk only for the metal bashers, which is basically true. I come from a manufacturing district. My family has been in Birmingham for generations and, over the years, we have been through bad, bad, good, bad and good times. During my political life—30-odd years—in the city of Birmingham, I have come to realise that manufacturing industry does matter.

The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) once said to me—it was not in private so I can repeat it in public

—that he did not care how jobs were created, as long as they were created. He said that service industries were fine. Of course service industries are important, but he thought that I concentrated too much on manufacturing industry. I believe that manufacturing industry is the fibre that holds the cloth of a country together. We all use things when going about our lives, whether we are riding a bicycle, driving a car, opening a fridge door, putting something in the oven, sweeping the carpet or going to bed—and everything has to be manufactured.

I agree that I am preoccupied, and almost obsessed with manufacturing, but when I see the balance of payments deficit running into hundreds of millions of pounds, I have to be preoccupied with manufacturing. It matters who manufactures the goods. As someone who is fanatical, I find myself buying too many foreign products. Why do I do so? Because often I can buy only foreign products. I am preoccupied with manufacturing industry and shall continue to be so, because if this country is to thrive, it must manufacture to survive.

The Governor of the Bank of England, who would be our master if we gave him entire freedom, as I said in an intervention during the speech of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The German banking system has much to recommend it. The German banks do not merely lend money for a glad, happy, quick return, but invest in their industry. They might have done so accidentally in the 1930s, but now they do so gladly. This week, the Bank of England encouraged the original concept of converting some overdrafts into preference capital or any other capital. That policy has a lot to recommend it.

Mr. Wolfson: I support my hon. Friend's point. Does he agree that the fact that German banks involve themselves more directly in industry than our banks, also brings management skills from German bankers into the management of industry? That may well be one reason for their greater effectiveness.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I agree with my hon. Friend to the extent that the German system is important because it brings the management of banks into a much more realistic accord with the management of manufacturing industry. Too often, banks lend hundreds of millions of pounds for a glamorous property or financial settlement, because it will give a quick, glad return.

If this country is genuinely going to thrive, it is not just up to Governments. It is nonsense to suggest that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor or, God forbid, a future Labour Chancellor, can say to industry, "You are going to survive, thrive and be hugely successful." Governments are not the grit that makes the pearl, but rather the shell that too often clamps shut, preventing the grit—of those who have to work—from succeeding. If there is any money to give away in the Budget, we should encourage initial allowances and new businesses and help business to prosper through tax concessions. We should not use the money to subsidise jobs or industry, but to encourage the British will to survive and manufacture to be more fruitful.

The second use for the money, which the Governor of the Bank of England is now taking up, is to encourage banks, not shut down manufacturing industries because they have short-term problems. As we have all seen in many of the Sunday papers that have concentrated on the issue, firms should not be shut down because of short-term cash flow problems. Some of the loans should be converted into genuine capital and the businesses should be given help, encouragement and support. I am not after lame dogs, but after helping the dog that has a temporary problem.

All hon. Members should realise that manufacturing industry is of huge importance. It matters how jobs are created in this land of ours. It matters that I, as a xenophobe who buys British if I can, often have to buy foreign goods. Let us reverse the tide of foreign goods, not by restrictions but by encouragement for those people, not just in Birmingham, but in the north and now the south, who want to manufacture and prosper. The day of the manufacturer should come. If it does not, the day of reckoning will come for this country.

7.8 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): It is sad that this country's economic climate is far bleaker than the weather outside. Although we can look forward to a thaw in the icy weather conditions, all that we can look forward to from the Government is another economic blizzard, heavier unemployment, more bankruptcies and more house repossessions. Daily, throughout the country, in my constituency and—more important for the Government—in Conservative constituencies, there are 3,000 job losses. Every day, 100 businesses fold up and go bankrupt and 150 homes are repossessed by the building societies and banks.

Although the cold weather can be put down to an act of God, the economic climate can be attributed only to an act of criminal neglect by the Tory Government, particularly the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), whose ghost seemed to haunt the Chamber this afternoon, especially among Conservative Members, who did not have a friendly word to say about him. It would be wrong to blame the right hon. Gentleman, because in 1988 the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was none other than the present Prime Minister. The sorcerer's apprentice is now in charge.

The 1988 Budget was a giveaway Budget to the super-rich. It sucked in a massive volume of imports and started the spiral of inflation. I am sorry to criticise the right hon. Gentleman when he is not in his place, but he is rarely in his place these days. He quickly swapped the leather of the Front Bench for the plush seating of a dozen boardrooms. Never has failure been so greatly rewarded as in his case. I understand that he has declared that he will not stand at the general election. I am sorry that he did not decide that before the previous election because it could have prevented the suffering of many of my constituents.

Let us return to the fact that the right hon. Gentleman's right hand man was the present Prime Minister. My constituents and the rest of the country are now at his tender mercies. I fear for them, because pain and misery being inflicted. In my constituency are, companies of various sizes are suffering badly. Ferguson Fabrics, for example, an old established, family firm of textile printers which has been going for 150 years, has been taken over. It survived the last Tory slump. I visited the factory about six months ago. It has modernised and invested in new plant and undertaken top-of-the-range printing, yet it has paid off 150 people and the rest are on short-time work. I hope that that company will survive to boom again, but it will find it difficult.

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

Another company, Copy Consultants, which would be called a yuppie company down south, is in trouble. Its managing director drove a Porsche and sold his furniture and equipment, all of which were made in Japan. Nevertheless, the company employed 500 people. Only two years ago, the company approached me for help to get bigger premises. Today it is in the hands of the liquidator. If we are lucky, we shall salvage some jobs from it.

We may talk about companies, but we do not get to the heart of the problem—the personal tragedies of job losses and bankruptcies. Like any good constituency Member, I read my local newspaper. Over the past year it has seen a change. We used to have births and deaths, but now we have births, deaths and bankruptcies. I suspect that that is the case throughout the country. I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will consider that.

An insolvency notice in a paper tells a great deal about human tragedy. There is one in this, the paper that I have here, but I shall not add to the individual's tragedy by naming him. The case is before the Cumbrian county court and the individual is now classed as unemployed. Those of us from the area know from his address that he is living on a council estate—there is nothing wrong with that—whereas it is clear from his former address that he used to live on a private estate. His tragedy is that he has lost not only his employment but his house.

The individual is a builder. I understand that 30 per cent. of bankruptcies involve building firms. They have been hit harder than any others. Last week my local paper also listed a grocer and a road haulier who had gone bankrupt. All those people believed in the enterprise culture, but they now face the bankruptcy court. At the bottom of the paper is the name of the official receiver—the official undertaker for that particular business.

Those are the results of high interest rates and reduced demand. It is not just a case of, "If it isn't hurting, it isn't working"; it is a tragedy. If ever a callous comment was made by a Prime Minister, that was it, and I suspect that it will be remembered long after all the other words of this short-lived Prime Minister. We must assist the economy.

It is a good job that we stopped locking up debtors, because if we had not, we would need a prison as big as Manchester. The real criminals are sitting on the Conservative Benches. The individual mentioned in the insolvency notice could have lost his job during the slump of the late 1970s and early 1980s—perhaps at a steel works on the west coast or in train manufacturing in my constituency. He was then beguiled into the business sector by those posh adverts put out by the Department of Trade and Industry, entreating people to be independent, to be entrepreneurs and to get £40 a week enterprise allowance. Those adverts said nothing about going bankrupt.

What do I say to that individual? I do not say, "Well, it's your fault." I do not think that it is. He has probably tried his best. He has not been a bad manager. He is the victim of macro-economics outside his control, and the bank has told him that his company is no longer viable. The irony is that probably many more companies are in a worse state than his, but they are so big that the banks cannot pull the plug on them. Earlier in the debate, complaints were made about big companies not paying bills. The fact is that many big companies are having difficulty paying wage bills, never mind suppliers' bills. We must tell that man that the Government are the problem. He is just another Major bankruptcy.

The man probably voted Conservative last time because he believed in the enterprise culture. He probably cannot understand why the Tory generals now tell him that he must be shot by his own side in order to win the war. The only war that interests Tory Members is the one for their re-election. That is what they are about. They have got the economy into a mess and they have decided that he must be a sacrifice. I hope that that gentleman recovers, starts in business again and votes Labour. I hope that he has more sense than to believe the fancy advertisements which the Tories have made with public money. The cost of the political propaganda which they have broadcast on television under the guise of the enterprise scheme runs into billions of pounds.

I also have a word for those on my Front Bench. When we win the general election—it cannot be far away now—we must quickly heal the wounds. We must get people back into work and back on the housing ladder. We must give those who are now in debt and bankrupt, but who have the ability to go back into business, a fresh start. If we do not, by next century Britain will be the poor man of Europe.

7.18 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Like almost everyone else, I strongly welcome the 0·5 per cent. cut in short-term interest rates announced today. It is small, but I hope that it is the beginning of a long and sustainable downward step movement of interest rates, following the inflation rate down which will now descend fast to levels that may for once even exceed the Treasury's estimates to the good and be lower than the 5·25 per cent. projected for the last quarter of the year.

My other hope about the process is that it will be conducted at a pace dictated by sound monetary considerations and by the Government and policy makers, not by pressure from the Confederation of British Industry, the media or even Back-Bench Members. I hope that the Government will establish that they are moving at all stages in this reduction of short-term interest rates at a pace consistent with domestic monetary considerations. That is absolutely vital, because if there is to be any gain from the miserable pain about which we keep talking, it must be to establish, once and for all, and after years and years, that sterling is a serious and potentially hard currency. We must pursue the sort of policies that Ludwig Erhard pursued in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s. We must establish the pound not as a long-sliding currency—the byword for devaluation and inflation above all other European and international currencies—but as a sound, tough and strong currency underpinned by firm domestic monetary conditions.

I must say—this will not endear me to all my colleagues—that it would be very much easier to establish that policy if it were not Ministers and the political wing of Government who were making the interest rate decisions at every point. I accept that some people will say that they are vital decisions, and that those who take them should be accountable to Parliament. That is true, but the fact remains that the extent to which they are taken by politicians, at funny times and whether justified or not by monetary policies—and inevitably surrounded by media

comment—means that their effectiveness in international currency markets is weakened. The credibility of monetary policy in the United Kingdom is permanently lamed and hobbled by the style and method with which we conduct it.

I feel quite sorry for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and for previous Chancellors, when out of their mouths must come the statement, "I have decided to cut interest rates," or, "I have decided not to cut interest rates." It is a hopeless message for international currency markets. It immediately tells them that decisions are being taken by a Minister, perhaps for reasons—I do not know, and we might be judging him unfairly—other than domestic monetary conditions.

I look back over the past 10 years to the time when I was in the Cabinet, and I have a sinking feeling as I remember hearing the confident forecasts of Chancellors in the early 1980s that they knew how to manage monetary policy. There was all that talk about the medium-term financial strategy: they knew how to do it; it was just a matter of following a sound monetary policy. However, they did not know; they could not establish, in the way that a separate monetary authority could, the full confidence of world financial markets in the monetary policy of this country. Chancellors in the Governments in which I served were wrong. The Treasury was persistently wrong, and has been wrong throughout the 1980s.

Even the distinguished economists who wrote a letter published in *The Times* today—many of them are personal friends whom I admire—have been spectacularly wrong. In their letter they say that they do not like the exchange rate mechanism but that everything would be right if we followed sound monetary policies. They, too, have not been able to define exactly how we can achieve that sound monetary policy.

Indeed, one of the most prominent signatories to the letter, Sir Alan Walters, only a few weeks ago said loudly and clearly that the problem with the ERM was that we could not raise interest rates but would have to lower them to keep within the bracket. Yet a few weeks later the cry is that we should lower them, but will have to raise them to keep within the bracket. I do not especially criticise Sir Alan; I am merely showing that the confident cries of Chancellors, economists and Treasury mandarins that they can deliver sound monetary policies by themselves turn out to be sadly wrong.

That is why I believe—I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) reached this conclusion in his resignation speech, and others are beginning to reach it in increasing numbers—that we need, if not an independent monetary authority, a very powerful monetary authority that is seen by international currency markets to be setting the pace in monetary policy decisions. That would make it much more effective when we came to cutting or raising short-term interest rates. I want movement in that direction, but until there is, Britain will be at a disadvantage in the management of our short-term interest rate policy.

The argument in this debate, and in the letter in *The Times*, is less about that—because people will assume, quite wrongly, that they can deliver a sound monetary policy if only they are allowed to do so—and more about whether the ERM is a terrible constraint on the pursuit of sound monetary policy or a reinforcement of such a policy. I come down on the side of those who believe that being in the ERM, within the present wide band, is a reinforcement. To put it the other way round, if we were not in the ERM, huge speculative forces would be building up against the pound, as they have done before, and vast walls of money would be ready to move in in an attempt to shorten the pound. Inflation and devaluation would be forced upon this country at a far faster pace than ever before.

In a sense, I regard the ERM as far from the prison bars that prevent us from following some track towards lower interest rates—which invariably lead towards more inflation and devaluation, which is what the policy amounts to in the end—and as something that, in the eyes of the international financial markets, restrains us within a wide band. I do not believe that the ERM is anywhere near as important as hon. Members crack it up to be. We are driven by forces governing our monetary policy that exist anyway, and would exist whether or not we had the ERM support. At the margins, the ERM provides additional support to our efforts to establish sterling as a serious currency and to maintain the value of our currency internally.

The only respectable escape route would be, as hon. Members have rightly said, if the Germans decided to revalue and there was a general realignment, with the pound and the franc going one way, and perhaps the lire, the peseta and the deutschmark being revalued. That is still a risk, and anyone who thinks that it is not is blind to the fact that Germany has become a large borrower. The bill for East Germany is rising by the day—another DM10 billion, according to today's newspapers. I have no doubt that the Bundesbank officials will be considering whether they need to raise interest rates again, or even to go for an outright realignment. We cannot change, order or persuade that if it happens, and it is a strong possibility.

The question is what will be done to bring Britain out of the recession, and how deep that recession will be. Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins)—the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service—I believe that there are counter-cyclical forces at work which, despite present trends, may make the recession a little less grim than some fear. First, there is the German boom, which continues with vast investment and virtual overheating in the German economy. Secondly, there is the prospect that the Gulf war will end on time and according to script, as I believe that it will—after which there will be a natural psychological boost to all sorts of investment projects that have been frozen around the world.

Thirdly, the Iraqis will have 1·5 million to 2 million barrels of oil a day that they will not be able to refine because they will not have any refineries left, so they will have to dump that oil on the world markets. That will mean a substantial fall in oil prices, which may hit our budget, but internationally will be stimulating and counter-recessionary. Fourthly, there will be vast reconstruction throughout Kuwait and the middle east, and the order has already been placed for that. Fifthly, there will be continual huge growth of foreign investment into this island, which is an amazing feature. All those things will mean that the recessionary forces may not be that severe.

I see the light winking at me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall simply repeat that the Government must accept domestic monetary conditions as its own master, and not be pushed by others. If they do, we will come out of the recession a little faster than the gloomy forecasts made in this debate have suggested.

7.28 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): It is apparent from today's debate that the Government's so-called economic policy is driving the British economy into a deep recession. If my constituents were asked for their verdict on the Government's handling of the economy, they would say that the Government had lost control of the economy and were inflicting pain on the working people of Britain for the sake of it.

The Bristol *Evening Post* recently reported that last year the number of companies in the south-west going into receivership increased by more than 200 per cent. That is the biggest year-on-year rise in the country. According to Peat Marwick McLintock, throughout the United Kingdom receiverships have more than doubled to nearly 2,634. Since 1979, my constituents have seen the industries in which they have worked destroyed and decimated and they have been thrown on to the unemployment register.

In Bristol, South, between March and December 1990, there was a 21 per cent. increase in the number of people claiming unemployment benefit. Our unemployment rate, ignoring the Government's 50 fiddles, runs at 14·5 per cent. My constituents are being denied work by the Government's economic strategy.

The autumn statement contained a proposal to cut training through the employment training schemes from 520 million to 370 million. The cut presumed a fivefold increase in private sector contributions to training. But businesses in the south-west are making savings on training in an attempt to survive the recession in which they now find themselves. Privately sponsored training schemes have only reached 10 per cent. of the Government's target. In Avon, that has meant a reduction in the training budget from £5·7 million to £4·3 million.

Yesterday and today training managers have been told that training schemes will be closed from 31 March with no alternative. Community Service Volunteers, North Bristol ITEC, Youth and Training, Kingswood Training Services, New Careers Employment Training, Gordeno Training, South-West Training and Age Concern have more than 200 trainees each on placements and they are to close. The number of training weeks that can now be funded in Avon has been cut by more than half, from 15,000 to 7,000. The number of training places currently in Avon is 2,500 and that is to be cut by 1,600 because of the Government's proposals. Yesterday, training managers were given their redundancy notices and told to close 11 schemes. That is in an area with high long-term unemployment.

Those trainees, many of them my constituents, who were in the middle of obtaining City and Guilds qualifications, were told that the training schemes were being scrapped; it was the end of the road. When my constituents asked what the alternative was, they were told it was the training and enterprise councils. But contracts have not yet been issued to the managers who will run the training schemes through the TECs. Moreover, it is not known how many places will be available and it has not been decided what training packages will be required. Therefore, training courses are being terminated with no prospect of any other scheme, and the trainees now have no chance of completing their qualifications in order to re-enter the employment market.

It gets worse. One trainee was told that he could have a training credit. That is a Government idea whereby training completed under one scheme will be recognised by another. But the Government have approved only 12 pilot schemes for transfer credits, and Avon does not have one of them.

Trainees who have suffered unemployment under the Government have the meagre training arrangements that they have been granted terminated and their only alternative is to return to the dole queue, look at the vacancies in jobcentres and join the job clubs. They have no right to a job or to training. If that has happened in Avon, the massive 28 per cent. reduction in the money available nationally must amount to a training scandal which shows administrative incompetence on an enormous scale.

My constituents will have an opportunity to read the report of my speech, so will the Minister tell them what emergency steps the Government will be taking to secure the training places of those 2,500 people on training courses in Avon, 1,600 of whom are to lose their places? We do not know what is to be done next year. We do not want to be told that the Government know that it is hurting. We want to know what the Government will do now to fulfil those training promises.

7.36 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Those hon. Members who spend a considerable time speaking to business audiences around the country are only too well aware that there is great concern within the business community about the problems facing it. That concern is usually evidenced by reference to the high interest rates, but when one begins to analyse the problems, one finds that they are not solely attributable to high interest rates. Many other factors cause businesses difficulties. For example, in many cases they have made internal misjudgments on their market over and above any general decline in the market, or they may have decided to alter their wage rates perhaps a little imprudently.

However, all those factors show that business must be better understood by Government, but not necessarily told what to do by Government. It is a mistake constantly to tell businesses that they should not pay such and such to their workers. That is not productive from the Government's point of view or necessarily well received by industry. There is always the danger that ultimately we get our come-uppance from the public sector. The Government's responsibility is to set the framework in which business can exist and try to be profitable and obtain a proper return on capital.

The banking sector has some responsibility to assist industry during a trough, which we are undoubtedly in at the moment. I was delighted to hear my hon. Friends this evening say that banks have seriously considered substituting their current loans for equity capital. Debt for equity swaps seems to be a constructive role for British banks to play. If they did that to a considerable extent, it would have two major impacts.

First, it would clearly reduce the marginal costs of business in terms of substituting equity for interest-bearing debt. Secondly, it would integrate our banking system much more into our industrial sector, and that, as we have seen in Germany, would mean that the banks would be proactive rather than just dispassionate and rather cold-heartedly accentuating a trough rather than trying to minimise it.

It is the Government's job to provide the framework, and it must be as stable as possible. We cannot continue to have an economy that leaps from low inflation to high inflation, from low interest rates to high interest rates—which is why I welcome the Government's current approach. They accept the necessity for discipline in monetary policy, not just domestically but in relation to our principal trading partners. That discipline is the European monetary system.

We could argue all night as to whether DM2·95 was the right level at which to enter the system. There are plenty of academics to argue both ways—some of them at the same time. The reality is that we went in at DM2·95, and it is in our interest to stop questioning that central rate and to accept it as the one to which the Government will hold. If that is done, industry can adjust its internal situation to accommodate that reality. More importantly, foreign holders of sterling will know that, contrary to historical evidence, sterling no longer has an inherent tendency to depreciate against other currencies. That will bring a remarkable change in the demands that they make in respect of interest rates if they are to continue to hold sterling, because the historical tendency for sterling to devalue has meant a premium for anyone holding it.

The Opposition completely failed to address the importance of monetary policy in respect of interest rates and currency. It is no use quibbling about whether the central rate is right, or bemoaning the fact that interest rates are too high. We want to know the Opposition's plans for a long-term framework for their policy. We know that the Government's policy is to hold the central rate within the ERM, and to ensure that that imposes its own monetary discipline so that our own inflation increasingly converges with that of our major partners in the Community.

We do not know either whether the Opposition believe that interest rates should be cut regardless of the impact that that action would have on exchange rates, and without knowing whether it would have an inflationary effect through devaluation. I suspect that it would, and the Opposition's policies would come to a sudden stop when they realised that sterling's falling value was having the effect of pumping inflation back into the economy. The Opposition would quickly have to excuse themselves, and to advocate instead a hike in interest rates. That is why the Government's policy of allowing any change in monetary policy or interest rates to be within the disciplines of the ERM is the right one and that most likely to lead to a sustained drop in interest rates as inflation falls.

The failure to observe that caution is the major flaw in the letter that was published in *The Times* today—although perhaps it is a compliment to the Government that it was signed by only six economists, not 364. Incidentally, they include Sir Alan Walters, whose role as an adviser to the Government was about as reliable as that of Rasputin in his time. The letter argues that depreciation "would not be inflationary." That is an unsubstantiated claim, and I strongly doubt that it could ever be substantiated. We must set a firm discipline, and industry must know what we are doing. The ERM is the right instrument.

I look forward to the Government clarifying their stance in respect of the increased public borrowing that is now inevitable. The demand has grown because of the Gulf war, and that is wholly justified, and cannot be seen just as a one-year item. It must be viewed over a longer term. Nevertheless, the general trend must lead us to expect some pressure on total borrowings, unless there is a balancing factor of savings and capital formation in industry. When my right hon. Friend devises his Budget, I am sure that, while acknowledging the public borrowing requirement, he will not panic. It is easily funded, and public sector debt will still remain at a much lower percentage than was the case in the early 1980s.

We might look to the Treasury team to apply some ingenuity to that end, given that monetary policy is largely dictated by the criteria of the exchange rate mechanism. I noted the admirable words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), and if our proposal for a European monetary fund is adopted in stage 2 of the move towards economic and monetary union, it will effectively determine monetary policy—probably using the hard ecu as the benchmark. If that is done, as is suggested in the Government's paper to the intergovernmental conference, monetary policy will increasingly be arrived at on a Community basis, which will allow the Treasury to exercise some ingenuity in respect of fiscal policy and the task of bearing down on the public sector borrowing requirement, year in, year out.

We have had a good few years of debt repayment, which puts us in a strong position to withstand this year's substantial borrowing requirement. We should not panic over that but should consider the longer term, and identify ways in which fiscal ingenuity will allow better management of the economy within a more stable monetary environment.

7.46 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Many will regard today's cut of 0·5 per cent. in interest rates as amounting to a half-measure. It is a half-hearted gesture, and it serves to remind us of other half-hearted gestures announced by the Prime Minister. I refer to the Government's half-hearted gestures towards haemophilia HIV victims and in respect of cold weather payments. They are concessions extracted from a Government under pressure and aimed at creating the illusion of action, rather than designed to tackle the root structural problems of society.

The Government are being panicked into doing the least they can get away with. It is a style of gesture politics that attempts to present an image of competence. The economy may grind to a halt, the manufacturing sector may go to the wall, and vital services may dry up—but the Government hope that, if they can maintain that image of competence, they can cling on.

There is universal consensus that the illusion is rapidly being shattered. Today, the Chancellor blithely announced that the price will be worth paying. Who will have to pay that price? Who will suffer that pain, because pain is not always evenly distributed? Often, it is the poor, low-paid and unemployed who must pay the highest price.

On 17 January, I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Social Security on the subject of poverty. He replied that the Government

"have pursued policies aimed at creating a competitive and thriving economy—because we believe that is the best way of helping all the people of this country.—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. *591*.]

The Government's policies have manifestly failed to achieve those aims. We are left with the Government's burnt-out belief in the trickle-down theory. The Government's own figures, which were squeezed out of

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them in a written answer published last July, show that, in respect of households of below-average incomes, the poorest 10 per cent. saw an increase in their incomes of 0·1 per cent. between 1979 and 1987, compared with an average increase of 23 per cent.

The number of people living on less than half the average income has risen from 4·93 million in 1979 to 10.5 million now, according to Government figures. The reality is a growing gap between rich and poor which demonstrates who is paying the price for the Government's economic failure. The poor have been punished by the Government's economic strategy, which is not an economic policy at all, but is proving to be an economic strategy for hardly anyone.

Even the World bank suggested at its January meeting that tackling poverty should be a top priority and proposed that loans should be offered for labour-intensive projects and investment in human capital, especially in agriculture, manufacturing and improvements to infra-structure. That international strategy is certainly not shared by the Conservative Government. Instead, the Government are deliberately allowing unemployment to rise. Roger Bootle, the chief economist at Greenwell Montagu, recently predicted that unemployment will rise to 2·7 million by the end of the year, and to more than 3 million by the end of 1992, according to the Government's lowest possible figures approach.

The Association of British Chambers of Commerce expects one in five manufacturing jobs to go. In my area, Leeds Chamber of Commerce, in its most recent survey, showed that a quarter of all firms surveyed expected their work forces to decrease within the next three months. At the February meeting of the World Economic Forum, Britain was singled out as the only major economy where recession was likely to be deep and protracted.

There is a significant difference in this recession because it is not merely manufacturing which is paying the price. The service sector is contracting—the Oxford economic forecasting unit suggested in a report that it will contract by 2 per cent. this year. In practice, that means that even the Midland bank branch in my constituency is closing. If the truth is that inflation will be hauled down, it will be because unemployment is driven up by Government strategy to bring inflation down.

Unemployment is again emerging as the instrument of economic strategy which the Government will use against inflation. In my area, it has risen to 7·8 per cent., according to Government figures, but in reality, according to the unemployment unit figures, it is somewhere in the region of 12·2 per cent. It is worth reminding the Government that, every time unemployment rises, there is a cost to the Treasury. For every 100,000 unemployed, it gets a bill of £300 million in social security costs. If unemployment rose to 2·9 million, the extra cost to the Government would be about £2,700 million.

Rather than going round the country shutting job centres, which is what is happening in my area at present, the Government should do more. We should nail the myth that people are pricing themselves out of work, because it rings hollow in Yorkshire—the region where wages are the second lowest in Britain. Recently, one company there negotiated a wage cut with its staff before it tragically went into liquidation. There was bargaining for a reduction in wages, so it is certainly not wage levels that are pricing people out of work.

The truth is that it is not a question of, "If it's not hurting, it's not working." That has been a throwaway slogan, and it reveals not that it is Government policy to stop the recession, but that Government policy is the recession. The effects are being felt hard on the ground.

The Sunday Times carried an article over Christmas entitled, "Top Business Men Desert the Party". It cited the fact that prominent business men were refusing to give money to the Conservative party because they blamed Government policy for the recession. The chairman of one company, Anglia Secure Homes—the country's second largest provider of old people's homes—replied to Lady Beaverbrook's invitation to the February ball at Grosvenor house in the following words:

"After a decade of hard work and commitment to free market ideology, I find in financial terms I am back where we started, to a future almost entirely reliant on a group of politicians deciding when to drop interest rates."

That sums it up.

When the Prime Minister tells us, as he did recently, that the pain is "regrettable but necessary," he is really saying that the economy is not in an inevitable crisis, and that this is not an act of God or fate, but that our problems are caused by Government-steered policy. It is a little late in the day for the Government to cry that the Gulf crisis has caused the underlying factors. The crisis in the economy and the recession are based on deliberate Government actions, for which they must be held responsible because they are directly responsible.

The Government have increased the uniform business rate and that is why factory and producer prices are up. The recession has been induced by the Government because inflation has been built into the structure with the poll tax, the uniform business rate, the 1988 Budget, which gave away £6 billion in tax cuts to the rich, and the property boom which was engineered by liberalising the banking system.

The Government have lost control over economic management. That is why, as soon as the Prime Minister dares to go to the country, the people of Britain will return a Labour Government and will prove that that illusion of competence is gone for ever.

7.55 pm

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): I fully support my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his insistence that we must tackle inflation as a top priority. Like everyone else, I welcome the modest cut in interest rates today.

I support the Government's cautious approach, which is much more sensible than that suggested by the six economists in *The Times* today. In that respect, I think that the Government are on course.

Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves why we are in this position and why inflation has gone so high. In the past 11 years, the Conservative Administration have done a wonderful job in the private sector. Very few businesses in the private sector are inefficient or overmanned, as that was shaken out long ago and it brought about the successful period that we enjoyed. However, we have dismally failed in the public sector, where there is enormous overmanning in all areas, and we must apply our minds to reducing it. At every turn there is waste. The health service has no decent management and never will

have until it is put on to a totally different basis. The worst offenders are local government, which employs 1 million more people now than in 1960.

What upsets me most about the autumn statement is that we are pouring more money into trying to make the unworkable poll tax work. We shall never succeed, and the sooner we recognise that the better. The community charge was a major mistake—an albatross around our necks—and we must get rid of it. I suggest that we get rid of this awful system before 1 April 1991 by a simple repealing Act—a one-clause Bill. We could then increase VAT in the Budget by 7 per cent. Everyone would pay and would pay according to their means, and the horror of the poll tax would be out of the way. It would be a major mistake to have another full year of the tax because it will have to rise considerably, especially as so many people have not paid.

I also draw attention to some of the extravagances that we tolerate in the public sector. Although it is commonplace to criticise bureaucracy and to say that we have too many administrators, we should ask a few other questions, for example, about teachers. We have 70,000 more teachers than we had in 1970—although I do not think that the education results are any better—and 735,000 fewer pupils. Any firm that operated on such a basis would soon be in dire trouble.

Then there is the health service. It is not only the administrators who are causing the problem. We are always boasting that 54,000 more nurses have been employed since we came to power, but we also have 90,000 fewer bed patients. Every time we engage an extra nurse, we lose one and a half beds. That needs urgent investigation: it is high time that the health service was put under proper management.

The Treasury forecasts are abysmal. No wonder: there are no real accounts anywhere in the public sector. The time has come for normal commercial and capital accountancy to be exercised in every sector of Government. We are deceiving ourselves at present; we are, as it were, flying blind.

It is obvious to hon. Members on both sides of the House, if they are honest, that we cannot get inflation down without a rise in unemployment. That is the simple truth. It is therefore not surprising that unemployment is now rising; we have been hiding it for several years by creating all sorts of strange training courses, which have not been very successful. I believe that potential employees can be trained only by the firms that are going to employ them. This training business has been a very expensive racket.

We must think again about how to deal with unemployment. For some reason, the Government have set their mind against the workfare scheme that the Americans have adopted extensively. Unemployment in Britain is set to rise, and shaking out the overmanning in the public sector would cause it to rise still further. We, too, should introduce workfare, instead of allowing millions of people to be paid to do nothing. So much work needs to be done that we cannot afford to continue in this way.

8.3 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I had not planned to speak, but, as I listened to the various clichés and half-remedies advocated by hon. Members on both sides of the House, I found myself irresistibly tempted to do so.

I have come to the conclusion that we are talking about two different subjects. One is the continuing—although, in my view, declining—problem of inflation. Some of today's speeches have suggested that inflation is the outstanding problem of the time; the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) were both so concerned about it that they suggested that we invent a new way of ordering our affairs, enabling an independently reconstructed Bank of England to make all the necessary decisions on our behalf.

Even if I accepted that inflation was the outstanding problem of today, I should find that suggestion rather naive. When all is said and done, the Bank of England is not a computer; it consists of men and women who advise the Governor on monetary policy and interest rates. There is no reason to believe that Bank of England governors and their staff will handle things any better than the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Treasury officials. I accept that they have a natural bias towards sound money and deflation, but beyond that I would not trust them at all. I see no reason to pay such a compliment to the governors of central banks, either here or abroad.

In this debate, concentrating on inflation really means concentrating on last year's or yesterday's problem. As was made plain by many speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House—very eloquent speeches from Opposition Members—the main problem now is that of recession turning into slump. No one who has seen the various indicators relating to monetary growth, unemployment trends, short-time working and bankruptcy can doubt that we are in for a severe recession—possibly the nastiest since the 1930s. That should be the focus of today's debate, along with this question: what must we do to halt or reverse the slide, and what instruments should we use, now that we have joined the exchange rate mechanism and are no longer free to use interest-rate or exchange-rate policy to combat the slump, unemployment and the major problem of falling output in manufacturing industry?

It has been interesting to observe the way in which various hon. Members have tried to deal with that question without facing it directly. What must we do in the new, vastly changed economic environment in which we so foolishly placed ourselves last October? The Chancellor's speech came shortly after the announcement of a half per cent. cut in interest rates. I am sure that he knows as well as any hon. Member that that is a pathetic amount in view of the internal needs of the British economy—the needs of British industry and the British public, especially mortgage holders. Why, then, does he not do more? The answer is obvious: if he does more, he can reasonably expect us to drop through the floor of the limit—6 per cent. from DM2·95 to the pound—to which he is entitled under the rules of the exchange rate mechanism.

The same problem produced some remarkable innovations in the thinking of some of the Chancellor's right hon. Friends. The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) is always well worth listening to, and, as we all know, is a very serious man. He suggested that the only

[Mr. Peter Shore]

option, now that we have lost control of interest rates, was an increase in public expenditure and something resembling an incomes policy—certainly in the public sector, if not in the private sector as well. That surely reflects the change that has taken place in our economic environment since we renounced the right to use the great weapons of economic management, interest rates and exchange rate.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have problems here too, because they advocate a greater reduction in interest rates than 0·5 per cent. They face the problem of what to do if a 1 per cent. or 1·5 per cent. cut takes us through the floor of the ERM, below the 6 per cent. margin against DM2·95. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) tried to deal with the problem. He obviously felt unhappy about it. His remedy was that the Germans should revalue and put the deutschmark up. He believed that, if the Germans put the deutschmark up against the rest of the currencies in the ERM, the problem would be solved and we could achieve the changed relationship between our currencies with minimum damage to ourselves.

Those approaches are unsatisfactory, because they do not deal with the dilemma of being in the ERM. I can come clean with the House and say that I am not in favour of membership of the ERM. Therefore, I am not constrained by the fear of dropping through the floor of the ERM by cutting interest rates, nor am I the least bit concerned about the change in relationship between the pound sterling and the deutschmark that would follow. On the contrary, I would welcome that. I am far from being in a minority in the country in terms of serious opinion about what our needs are.

Everyone has referred to the letter in *The Times* today. It is right about going into the ERM in October at that exchange rate. I have plucked out an editorial from *The Times* of 14 December. It says:

"The highly political decision to enter the European exchange rate mechanism last October and at an exchange rate of DM2·95 to the pound looked like a mistake at the time. Today this can no longer be doubted after the juxtaposition of yesterday's unemployment figures with the previous day's blustering about interest rates by Norman Lamont in his first Commons performance as Chancellor".

I have great sympathy with the Chancellor. What can a Chancellor do except bluster when we have entered an exchange rate mechanism at the wrong rate? We cannot expect him to come here and confess because that would be folly. The first casualty of entering an exchange rate system is that one can no longer tell the truth. We all know that. That was the great problem that dogged us through the 1960s until we floated in the early 1970s.

William Rees Mogg—no softie on inflation, he—said in *The Independent* on 11 February:

"The recession will be deeper and investment will be lower because of the destabilising effects of entering the ERM at the wrong rate, and at the wrong phase of the British—and, indeed, of the German—trade cycle."

That is pretty clear and I do not think that the opinions that I have quoted are anything other than representative of the majority of economists of all points of view, whether left or right—if one can say that about economists—and of a large number of British business men, not to mention those in the construction industry, and others.

I am concerned about the problems of recession and the possible slump that we are now in. I am desperately anxious to avoid the damage to our economy and people that a further bout of deflation and unemployment will bring. I do not think that our problems will be solved by simply lowering interest rates or by waiting for the effects of those admirable medium-term measures of training and education that my right hon. and hon. Friends so frequently urge upon us. Something has to be done in the short term. Interest rates alone, even if they are cut, will not be sufficiently effective to deal with the problem of reviving our manufacturing industry and making a major contribution to closing the vast and unmanageable deficit on our current account trading and our balance of payments. We cannot go on running a current account deficit of over £11 billion or £12 billion a year. If it goes on for another two or three years, we will soon find ourselves a net debtor overall in terms of our national assets.

We are not getting a switch of resources. A deflation sometimes, provided that we are competitive at home, will drive resources into exports and import substitutions to the benefit of our current account balance. That is not happening on the scale that is needed. The output of our manufacturing and other industries, which is no longer being bought by domestic consumers, cannot be switched effectively into export markets because the price is wrong. We know that the only way of dealing with the problem of over-valuation is to change the basic exchange rate of the pound against the deutschmark. That is the one way open to us, just as it is the one way open to the United States to change the dollar in its relationship to the yen and the mark in order to close its vast current account deficit.

We are not competitive now, and we must become so. The problem has arisen for us in the exchange rate mechanism. As I have said, one cannot be a member of the ERM and still have a policy of running one's own exchange rate or interest rates. However, one can temporarily agree to freeze those policies if one is in a mechanism within which one can change from time to time. In other words, it is possible to correct an overvalued exchange rate in the ERM because there is still a mechanism—it is not easy to operate—that allows currencies to realign against each other.

Anyone who is contemplating further steps towards economic and monetary union where there is to be a permanently locked exchange rate and a single currency had better look carefully at what is happening in Britain today. They had better look carefully at what happened in 1980, 1981 and 1982, and they had better have a jolly good look at what happened when Winston Churchill put us on the gold standard. They should look at the agony that overtook the Government of that day—I believe that it was a Labour Government—as they attempted to escape from the appalling problems.

I strongly urge the Chancellor to think hard about the decision taken by his predecessor, now the Prime Minister, and I hope that he will be courageous in his conversations with him and bring about the change in the basic rate of the pound against the deutschmark that lies at the centre of our affairs.

8.18 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his announcement today and on his strong nerves. One needs

strong nerves if one is to fight inflation effectively, because one has to stand up to a great many pressures, some of which have manifested themselves in the debate. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been right all along to say that interest rates must not come down further and faster than is consistent with our counter-inflationary strategy. He has been especially brave to say that the arbiter of whether interest rates can come down further with safety should be the market. He has accepted the discipline of the market bravely.

The fact that the market responded positively today——

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend know how much intervention there was today?

Mr. Davies: I should be a very rich man if I knew how much intervention had taken place in the foreign exchange markets on any given day.

The fact that sterling did not depreciate against the deutschmark two weeks ago when the Germans increased their Lombard rate, and that the market responded so positively today to the reduction of half of 1 per cent. in base rates, is a considerable tribute to the success of the policies adopted by my right hon. Friend. I hope that he continues in the same vein and that if he believes that additional expansion is necessary he will look as much or more to fiscal measures as to monetary measures in the weeks and months ahead.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) about the desirability of trying to advance certain types of capital expenditure in these circumstances. If we are to increase public expenditure to generate some expansion of demand, it is sensible to target it on the construction and infrastructural sectors, for which the employment multiplier of any additional spending is high and for which the import multiplier tends to be low. If we know that we shall have to undertake expenditure on certain capital projects—my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing mentioned hospitals and I might add projects such as converting the A1 to a motorway or building a fast rail link between the channel tunnel and London—it must make sense to attempt to undertake them now, when capacity utilisation rates are so low, and not to wait for the next boom.

The most remarkable aspect of this afternoon's debate has been the sense of gratification and enjoyment that some Labour Members seem to derive from the fact that we are in a recession. It is foolish of them to adopt that attitude, representing as it does the worst sort of political short-termism——

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with that. Opposition Members resent the recession bitterly because it was caused by the policies that the hon. Gentleman supports and because our constituents suffer most from it.

Mr. Davies: The trouble with that is that the hon. Lady's colleagues—we have not yet heard her speech—have tended to imply that, had they been in charge, things would have been better. But the evidence that has emerged from today's debate confirms the impression, widespread outside the House, that, had the Labour party been in charge, things would have been a great deal worse.

I offer a few examples of that. We have already considered interest rates. It has been pointed out that in 1988, when, arguably, the economy was overheating, far from demanding an increase in interest rates, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) demanded nothing of the kind. Indeed, around that time he demanded a further reduction in them.

It is a great deal worse than that. As long as I have been in this House, and no doubt for many years before that, no Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has ever done anything but demand reductions in interest rates or resist increases in them—irrespective of the state of the economic cycle, of the monetary aggregates or of any other indicator. The Opposition have placed themselves in the position of a man who purports to know how to drive a car and believes, irrespective of the direction the road takes, that the steering wheel must always be turned in the same direction. Such a person is not someone to whom the country would want to hand over the direction of its affairs.

It is foolish to derive political pleasure or gratification from a recession. Trade and business cycles have always been with us and always will be with us. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) or the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East seriously wish to imply—I hope that they will never be drawn into the temptation of implying—that should the electorate impose a Labour Government on us after the next election—which God forbid—we shall somehow enter a qualitatively new phase of economic history, and that the trade cycle will no longer press upon the brow of mankind. If they imply that, they will destroy whatever reputation they still may have for economic judgment. I notice that the hon. Member for Derby, South is not going to contradict me.

I should have thought that the Labour party would use an occasion such as this debate to try to demonstrate to the country that the economic management of the nation would be better in its hands in all the ups and downs that we shall face in the future, just as we have always faced them in the past—but on that score the Opposition have done themselves a disservice. It is clear that their judgment has been consistently wrong on interest rates, so they have no serious standing from which to tell us how we should manage monetary policy, as at every juncture they have adopted the same automatic, mindless, knee-jerk reaction of claiming that interest rates are too high and should come down. That is not the way to manage a sophisticated economy—or, indeed, any economy.

It does not stop there. The Labour party has plans for public expenditure. Again, at every juncture and regardless of the state of the business cycle, the Opposition clamour for more public expenditure for every imaginable good cause—and even for a number of causes that not all of us would regard as good. Of course they want more public expenditure on the NHS and on education and training—the list grows longer as Parliament proceeds.

This afternoon, we have been told of two areas on which the Opposition would spend more public money irrespective of whether the economy could afford it: pensions and child benefit. Worthy as those objectives might be, it is extraordinary to say that we should have more public expenditure regardless of whether the economy can afford it. What do we think of a man or woman who says that he or she is planning further expenditure, irrespective of whether they can afford it? The answer is that such people appear in the bankruptcy courts every week.

[Mr. Davies]

This afternoon, Opposition Members repeatedly said that we need higher taxation. The Labour party offers the country a prospectus of higher income tax and higher marginal rates—up to 59 per cent. in the latest proposal. Have the Opposition seriously considered the economic damage that would be done by re-establishing this country as the most highly taxed nation on the European continent? We should be higher taxed even than Sweden, since the Swedes have learnt the lesson and have recently reduced their taxes. In case the hon. Member for Derby, South has any doubts about that, I repeat that 59 per cent. would establish this country as having the highest marginal rate of tax on the European continent. All sorts of individuals—inevitably, by definition, those who would add the greatest value to the economy—would be tempted to pursue their activities elsewhere.

I take it that the Labour party does not wish capital gains tax to fall behind—it would hardly wish to favour capital gains over income. No doubt the higher marginal rate of capital gains tax would also be increased to 59 per cent., or even more. Has the Labour party even begun to think through its proposals and to consider the enormous economic damage that would be caused by increasing the capital gains tax? For example, a venture capitalist who was investing in his business or someone else's and who was faced with an increase of perhaps 50 per cent. in capital gains tax rate would require—depending on the pay-back period—a 200 or 300 per cent. higher pre-tax return to ensure that there was an equivalent post-tax return. Few investment projects would meet that threshold, investment would not be undertaken and the economy would be damaged.

It does not stop there. The Labour party has what it calls an employment policy to establish a statutory minimum national wage. Remarkably, Labour Members also tell us—apparently with great sincerity—that they would like more rather than less employment. Those two statements can be reconciled in only one way: on the assumption that the Labour party has not learnt an elementary principle of economic science—if the price of a commodity is increased, demand for it is reduced. Clearly, if the price of labour is increased, demand is reduced, resulting in less employment.

I hope that this interesting debate has been closely followed by the electors. If it has, they can draw only one conclusion about the party to which they should entrust the management of the economy, with its inevitable ups and downs. We need a pair of hands that are reliable and we have shown that, over the past 10 years, in all circumstances, the Conservative party has come up with the best record for economic management in the European Community.

8.32 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I disagreed with almost everything that the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said. He made a poor contribution and got the basic position totally wrong. The Government's motion shows that they do not live in the real world and do not understand what is going on. When Conservative Members speak as the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding spoke, I understand exactly why the Government tabled the motion. They have failed to recognise the problems facing the country.

I should like to take up some specific items in the speech of the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding. He referred to the Labour party's policy on a national minimum wage—a policy which I strongly support and which the Labour party should have supported many years ago and implemented when in government. I represent and live in a part of the country where low wages are traditional. I should like Conservative Members to say, for a change, that they believe in fair wages. We should be trying to achieve that. Many people live on totally unacceptable wages. Some people in my constituency who are married and have children work a 40-hour week for £50, and some work for even less. That is an outrage. I accept that they can get family credit but it is deplorable that such wages should be paid in 1991.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding argued that low wages would save jobs. If one asked people who live in areas with traditionally low wages whether those wages have saved jobs, they would say no. The population in the area covered by the former county borough of Burnley, which has been amalgamated into the bigger new borough of Burnley, is just over half what it was in 1921, because people have been leaving the area. We have changed the type of employment provided in Burnley, but many factories that replaced the cotton and coal industries have gone out of existence. We have moved into service industries, but the people involved are under pressure and are losing their jobs.

The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), often said that low pay was better than no pay. It is time that we started to talk to everyone who works for a living and to ensure that they get fair remuneration for their work. That is an essential ingredient in the Labour party's policy of a national minimum wage.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding warmly welcomed the 0·5 per cent. reduction in interest rates, as we all do. However, there will be no leaping for joy tonight in my constituency. The industrialists will not feel any great benefit from a mere 0·5 per cent. reduction, and mortgage payers will not get any immediate advantage. The Government must do much more.

The hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) called the poll tax an albatross around the Government's neck. He said that it should be abolished as soon as possible. I agree, although I do not agree with its formula or with its alleged simplicity. The Government must recognise that the poll tax is basically flawed because of its total unfairness. The quicker it is scrapped the better.

A few weeks ago, the Government announced that there would be additional assistance for people who would lose more than £2 a week because of the poll tax compared to their last year of paying rates and that there would be a different basis for the calculations. Although the Government's measures will be a tremendous benefit to many of my constituents, I believe that they were introduced in the short-term interest of electoral advantage. The Government have introduced an arbitrary method and many people are worried that it will be a temporary measure for this year. There are no assurances about what will happen next year.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that it was increasingly

evident that, when figures start to give the wrong answers, from the Government's point of view, the information is no longer available. I want to give a couple of examples to prove that what he said was absolutely true.

On several occasions I have asked for information about the change in output in the north-west between 1979 and the time for which the latest figures are available, and I have put similar questions about investment and employment in manufacturing industry in the area. In the case of jobs, there was a reduction of 38 per cent.; in the case of investment, the reduction, in constant terms, was over 30 per cent. For a period, the Government managed to get the national figure for investment above the 1979 figure, but in many key manufacturing areas, even on the basis of the best figures, they had not reached the levels of 1979. In the north-west, the figures for investment and for output were both down by more than 30 per cent. That underlines the problem that the Government still fail to recognise. Such questions can no longer be asked.

There is another matter about which I want to question the Government. It is one in respect of which they no longer produce figures because the answers that would be forthcoming are not answers of the type that the Government would wish to give. Just over 18 months ago, I went to Reading with the Environment Select Committee. As we were passing through the town, I happened to notice the wages that were being offered in the jobcentre. When I found out the wages for comparable jobs advertised in jobcentres in my constituency and in other parts of Lancashire, I found out that they were a fraction of those that I had noticed. I recently tabled a question on this matter, but the answer that one now gets to such questions, is "This information is no longer collected centrally." As soon as information that is being collected ceases to suit their purposes, the Government stop producing it.

I turn now to my reasons for thinking that the Government's record over the past 12 years has been one of failure. I do not welcome the current recession. It is a great tragedy, but it is the Government's fault; they must accept full responsibility for it. The tragedy is that they have failed to learn the lessons of the recession of the early 1980s. They have failed to recognise the need for investment in industry and for investment in training and education with a view to the provision of a skilled work force. *[Interruption.]* Let me say to the hon. Gentleman who intervenes from a sedentary position that, sadly, this country's record of investment in its greatest asset—its people—is appalling by comparison with those of the countries with which we compete. It is time the Government did something to get it right.

When I refer to a skilled work force, I include skilled management. At certain levels of management there is still a lack of skill—a lack of people who are able to motivate and make sure that we can compete successfully. It is extremely important that we tackle that problem.

There is something else that the Government have failed to recognise. When industries are in danger of closing down—and industries do close down—there is no point in talking about switching to the export market goods that are not required on the home market, or of switching to the home market goods that are not needed on the export market. Once industries have gone, they are gone, and their products no longer exist either to sell on the home market or to export or for import substitution. Industries have been allowed to disappear.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), in putting a question to the Prime Minister the other week, I believe put his finger on the difficulties of manufacturing industries. We have gone into the ERM with our currency tied to the German mark. The Government alone failed to recognise that the level was too high. All those from the industrial and commercial sectors that one meets say continually that it is too high. The only people who defend it are the Prime Minister and his friends in the Government. If we have got the rate wrong—if it makes imports cheap and exports dear—we shall continue to fail.

For far too long, the Government have failed to recognise that manufacturing is this country's bread and butter, and that the regions need far more investment. In saying that, I am in no way dismissing the importance of the service industries or tourism to the national economy. But this is a manufacturing nation, and its future depends on the ability of manufacturers to compete and to export more. Until we get that right, the economy will continue to decline. Interest rates are a major factor in preventing investment, together with the exchange rate problems that industry faces. The Government will have to face up to these problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) referred to repeated newspaper reports of bankruptcies and other such problems. In my local newspaper, I see, week after week, reports of redundancies. Firms affected include British Aerospace in Preston, which employs workers from Ribble Valley, Philips, Main Gas, Skipper's garage, Compound Engineering and Endsleigh Insurance. I could spend the rest of the time allowed for this debate listing firms that have closed down and firms that have had to make people redundant. Let me give the unemployment increases in neighbouring constituencies: Pendle 16·9 per cent., Hyndburn 10·3 per cent., Burnley 10·1 per cent., Rossendale and Darwen 14·8 per cent., Calder Valley 23·4 per cent., and Ribble Valley 6·9 per cent. Those increases all took place between March 1990 and December 1990. That is the Government's record.

During the next few days, I shall spend quite a bit of time in Ribble Valley. I know what problems are being faced by people there who can no longer afford their mortgages. I know also of the pressure on industrialists in that constituency. I am thinking of firms such as Ribble Cement, which depend on the construction industry, which is under great pressure. I know of the pressure on farmers, who, in cash terms, are getting lower prices for livestock than they were getting two years ago. In real terms, the situation is even worse. Farmers who have borrowed to buy livestock or premises are being squeezed very hard by interest rates. They know that the Government have failed. They know that the Government, even with a change of leadership, have no answers to the problems.

The Government have failed to tackle the problems, and they will continue to fail. When the general election comes, they will fail yet again. The people will elect a Labour Government to deal with the problems and to restore Britain to prosperity.

8.48 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): As other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall be brief.

I shall pay particular attention to a point made by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr.

[Mr. Mark Wolfson]

Shore), who brought us back to the nub of the question that has arisen throughout the debate—that we are now in a new position because of our membership of the ERM and that new thinking must be brought to bear now that there is an additional constraint with regard to interest rates and the use of them. This debate has made it clear that economics is an art rather than a science.

Another point that comes over to me time and again in debates on the economy is that, for more than 40 years, Britain has struggled continually with the problem of how to handle sterling, both as an internal currency and as an international currency. That problem will not go away. There is now an additional constraint, and we have to take action within that.

Many hon. Members have referred to the fact that inflation is falling quickly, and I support that view. It is essential that it does so because British exports of goods or services cannot otherwise be competitive. Therefore, I fully support the Government's attempt permanently to control and squeeze out inflation.

I represent a southern constituency in which there is not a great deal of manufacturing activity. However, my constituency contains a number of small businesses and I should bring home to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench the reality of the recession and its effect on jobs even on the most buoyant side of our economy. It is essential that we bring down interest rates as rapidly as is prudent with sensible rectitude. Today's move is welcome, but it is a small move. I hope that we shall see a continuation of such movement in a very short time.

Many of us still wonder whether we entered the ERM with an overvalued pound. The discipline of operating within the ERM and the limits that that places on us can be healthy in the long term, but it must not be a form of slavery. We still have some room for movement if that should prove to be absolutely essential. My right hon. and hon. Friends must keep a close eye on that point and not be over-obsessed with the idea that moving outside the present band would be a disaster. Our exports are under great restraint at the moment.

For many years, I have been concerned about the fact that Britain has a tendency—both among individuals and businesses—to spend highly. I have not been happy with our somewhat purist view that credit control should necessarily be anathema to the Conservative party. It might be heresy to air such a view on the Conservative Benches, but I believe that Conservative policies are not "never for never". Within the new constraints that the ERM places on what we can use interest rates for, it may be necessary to consider instruments that we have previously put aside. Interest rates are a blunt instrument. I am not happy that, 10 years after the last recession, we have had to return to a very hard regime in order to squeeze inflation down once more. We must learn from this second experience and perhaps introduce new thinking in the future.

If we accept that business cycles will occur in the future, we cannot remove the tendency to inflate even if a Conservative Government continues in power. I have no confidence that we would not proceed to very high inflation under a Labour Government. Inflation will still cause problems, and we need all the possible instruments at our command to control it.

We could argue, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) did in the past, that borrowing in a freer money market like the one we have established over the past 10 years, requires education, and that people must learn the hard way not to borrow unreasonably. That is a rather over-optimistic view of human nature, particularly in view of the huge barrage of advertisements for bank lending. Indeed, I received a letter today offering a loan of £10,000, apparently at the end of a telephone call. We cannot simply argue that individuals must resist such advertisements.

I hope that greater consideration will be given in the Budget to ways in which we can encourage saving. We must turn Britain from a spending society into a society in which saving is more heavily emphasised. The TESSA plan is a step in the right direction, but I should like to see more radical approaches and greater encouragement in terms of tax incentives to encourage saving.

We need new thinking in a new environment. I support the necessary, but very hard, measures that the Government have taken so far. Inflation is falling and it will continue to fall rapidly. We must now stimulate the economy as quickly as possible to stop the recession turning into a dangerous slump.

8.55 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I want to bring the Chief Secretary to the Treasury back to reality, which my right hon. and hon. Friends have done in their contributions. I want to bring to the attention of the House the progress of a firm in my constituency called Bridgeport Manufacturing, which is in Forest road, in Leicester. In 1986, it received the Queen's award for industry.

Bridgeport Manufacturing is the largest machine tool manufacturer in the country. Only a few months ago, the then Minister for Industry visited the firm to congratulate it on its great achievements in exports and its contribution to the British economy. In the past few weeks, the managing director of that company has had to announce more than 100 redundancies. That is the biggest set of redundancies that the company has ever had to make.

I visited the factory two weeks ago last Friday to witness the effects of the Government's policy on that firm. No one was working in Bridgeport Manufacturing on the day that I visited, because there was no work for the workers. The managing director is a great Conservative party supporter and he told me that he could not imagine a worse time than the present for his company and the rest of industry in the east midlands.

The Confederation of British Industry in the east midlands today published a survey which shows that more companies have gone bust in the area than at any time in the region's history. That is a direct result of the Government's policies.

Nothing that the Chancellor has said will do anything to reassure the management of Bridgeport and the management of other firms in Leicestershire. They report a record fall in expenditure on their products. Spending on their products was down by about 40 per cent. in the past year. They have informed me of their fears about what will happen as the year goes on.

Of course we welcome the 0·5 per cent. reduction in interest rates, but that is precisely the line that was argued by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition when he faced the Prime Minister on Tuesday. He categorically said that the level of interest rates was so high that it was crippling British industry and making the recession even more damaging than it has been of late. Clearly, 0·5 per cent. is not enough. It is not enough to save the textile and footwear industries in the east midlands, and especially in Leicester. One third of jobs in the textile industry and a quarter of jobs in the footwear industry are based in the east midlands. In 1979, 371,400 people were employed in the textile industry, but, by 1990, that figure had dropped to 206,000. In 1979, 68,000 people were employed in the footwear industry, but that figure dropped to 44,800, a reduction of about 43 per cent., in the past 10 years. Therefore, 188,000 jobs have gone for ever.

It is impossible for the Government to legislate or to bring forward any policies that will result in any success for those two industries. Time and again, manufacturers have told me and to my colleagues that there must be a dramatic cut in interest rates. They suggest 2 per cent., but it must be even more than that if the Government are to save those two industries. Eight jobs in those industries are being lost every hour.

Nothing in the Chancellor's speech would give any comfort to national health service consumers in Leicester. We are still relying on a jumble sale health service, with people having to launch appeals for even the most basic necessary equipment for our two biggest hospitals, the Royal infirmary, and the Leicester general hospital. Nothing in the Chancellor's statement will ease the concerns of staff in the national health service or those who happen to use it.

We have record homelessness and home repossessions in Leicester. The Alliance and Leicester building society, one of the largest in the country, announced only yesterday that 49 families' homes were repossessed last year, compared with three families' homes being repossessed the year before, and it estimates that matters will get even worse.

The Government simply do not care. The Chancellor and the Treasury team have grand titles—for example, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Financial Secretary, and Economic Secretary—but they do not create jobs. They do not provide resources that would help the economy of Leicester or of the east midlands. All they do is create misery. This is a time of great violence throughout the world, but we forget about the Government's violence when old people's homes are without heat in the winter, when schools are without books and are literally decaying before our eyes because of insufficient resources, and when the health service is in deep crisis. Nothing is being provided by the Government to help the people who live in Leicester, East, and nothing is being done to provide any more resources.

When my party is in government, as it surely will be this year—that is my estimate of the date of the next election—no Government in the history of the country will have faced the economic mess that we shall inherit. Conservative Members do not need to hear that from me. When the Chief Secretary returns to his constituency this weekend, there will be no garlands welcoming him in Putney high street. Those who once lived in prosperous Putney will tell him exactly the same story as the people of Leicester have told me and other constituents have told my hon. Friends: the Government are a disaster, they have provided no help for people, and the quicker they go the better.

9.4 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I wish to express my concern for the plight of many young people who are finding it difficult to meet their mortgage payments, of small businesses which are having terrible trouble with overdrafts and of large businesses which are struggling to meet their payroll. Those are serious problems. I sometimes think that, in this sheltered world, we forget the misery that our economic policies inflict on ordinary people. It is good to let them know that some of us feel guilty and upset on their behalf mostly because, as Back-Benchers, we can do little about it. I want to make some practical suggestions; I hope that the Chancellor will be here in time to listen to them.

Early in the debate, when the Front-Bench spokesmen were at each other's throats and everyone was at their throats, there was much banter. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was asked for his solution and his alternatives. No one has come up with alternatives, and we still have the dilemma of high interest rates, recession and inflation.

Other countries—our competitors—are successful, with low interest rates and low inflation; America, Japan, Germany, Austria and Switzerland all have something in common—the minimum of political interference in the banking structure and the maximum opportunity for their currencies to respond to what are colloquially known as market forces.

Politics messes up economies. It does not matter which political party is manipulating the scene, it is politicians who make a muck of things. If we really wanted to control inflation and the recurring cyclical problems, we would move away from artificial political control, including the ERM and the nonsense of a gigantic central European bank, back to an independent banking structure. We had that in Britain. There was a time when interest rates bobbed along at 2 per cent. to 4 per cent. Before the turn of the century the Government nationalised the banks and the Bank of England came into existence.

Mr. Budgen: In 1945.

Mrs. Gorman: I take my hon. Friend's point.

We once had a much more liberal banking structure and a much freer economy. As a result, we had much lower interest rates. Of course it will be difficult to move from where we are now, as many hon. Members have said, to where we should be if we truly want an economy with low interest rates and steady growth. In the long term, there is no alternative. Hitching our bandwagon to an outside organisation—be it the Bundesbank or any other—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves and control our economy, is nonsense.

The German economy will go through bumpy times in the attempt to amalgamate the country and bring the east German money in from the cold. Germany will have many problems, the last of which we have not seen. As its problems increase, they will reflect on our economy. We have no idea what the effect will be on our domestic position.

Not everything is gloom and doom. Although we all deplore the number of people becoming unemployed, we

[Mrs. Gorman]

have to remember that the great majority of our citizens are still in jobs. Not every aspect of the economy is in decline. In my constituency, 5,000 new jobs have just been created in a big new marketing centre. The docks at Tilbury, on the border of my constituency, having been liberated from the dock labour scheme, are doing very well, with new businesses and lots of new jobs coming on stream. So there are spots in the economy which are doing well.

When we come out of the difficult patch, our economy will recover much more quickly than some people think. The British economy relies to a larger extent than many hon. Members realise on the financial, banking and international money markets, which recover much more quickly than manufacturing industry. They are an important part of our economy, and are not normally taken into account when considering our position.

We can give people facing personal problems some practical suggestions and help. Young people with a large mortgage who do not know how to keep up the payments could easily take in one or two lodgers. I made that proposal the other day, in a speech on a 10-minute Bill. In the Budget, the Chancellor could allow people to earn up to about £100 a week without the bother of the tax man and all the regulations, which would help them to meet their mortgage payments. That is a good, practical suggestion.

There are many young wives and young women with children who could go out to work and help with the family budget. There are still part-time jobs that they could take if the Chancellor would help women with child care, which would solve another practical problem. It would be sensible for the Chancellor to encourage more savings by announcing in the Budget that interest will not be charged on them. That would give people a greater incentive to save. Although times are hard, they could be made better by good, common-sense, practical suggestions.

I know that the Chancellor has to go along the path that he has set himself, and that we have to go through this period of tears in order to come out into the sunshine on the other side, but, in the short term, the Chancellor could do the country and himself much good by taking account of the practical realities of what people are going through, and giving them an opportunity to help themselves out of their difficulties.

9.12 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): It is three months since the former Chancellor rose to present the autumn statement to the House. When I returned to the text of the statement and its accompanying documents, it was almost like stepping back into another world—a strange, closed world, occupied by the Government, in which a recession might lie hidden in the figures and tables in the back of the document. In that world, the recession must not only be excluded from the text, but be denied any credence or recognition.

I do not know whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are familiar with the concept of a retreat. It is a sort of withdrawal from the world for a period of peace and meditation during which one concentrates the mind on higher things. As I read not only the autumn statement but the words with which it was introduced by the then Chancellor, I increasingly got the feeling that the Government had, at that point, gone into retreat. That would tie in with their approach to the problems besetting our economy, as far as the Government admit the existence of such problems. They behave as though the recession were due to an act of God, a well-known get-out clause in insurance policies.

The Government either deny with well-simulated indignation that our problems are as real or as great as we suggest, or they look around in surprise as though searching for a culprit. There is certainly no visible sign of the Government taking any responsibility for their actions, with one outstanding exception, to which the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) referred. The exception was that little mistake that the Government admitted making in 1987, when they cut interest rates. That step was then being advocated by the Opposition as well as the Government, and was taken at that time in all the major economies.

However, in no other economy has that step led to a recession on the size or scale of ours. We have never been able to get the Government to come to terms with how it was that, if they made only one little mistake and have done nothing else wrong since, that step did not have as disastrous an effect elsewhere as it did here. Whatever difficulties countries such as Japan, Germany and France and Italy have, the statistics show that none of them has difficulties on the same scale as ours.

I shall remind the House how reluctant the Government have been even to admit that problems exist. When the then Chancellor, now the Prime Minister, introduced the autumn statement, he became very huffy with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) when he used the word "recession". He said that my right hon. and learned Friend "used the word in the way most calculated to alarm". The then Chancellor continued:

> "The right hon. and learned Gentleman's use of the word recession conjured up an image quite different from the reality of what is happening or is expected to happen in future."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 125.]

Let us consider what is happening or is expected to happen. From every quarter of the land comes the cry not just of recession, but of severe recession from every type of business—large and small, manufacturing and services. The Government undoubtedly have a quality all of their own. In their first recession in the early 1980s, they destroyed about 20 per cent. of our manufacturing base. This time, affecting south as well as north, services and financial industries as well as manufacturing, they are going, as a cynic in the City said to me the other day, for the "double whammy". They are picking up what they missed first time round. The reality of what is happening presses in on the House, if not on the Government, from every side.

The CBI survey made its terrifying forecast of an investment fall of 16 per cent. The British Chamber of Commerce, using figures from the Department of Trade and Industry, showed that last year was the worst ever for insolvency. Trade Indemnity, the credit insurance company, predicted a further 25 per cent. rise in business failures this year, following a 77 per cent. increase last year. On top of that predicted fall in investment, there is growing evidence of other problems. In industries such as construction, for example, companies are cutting training.

That is damaging not only in itself, but will make it harder for them to meet the demand which will surface when the recovery comes. Apart from being damaging in themselves, skills shortages feed inflation. Those shortages were evident not only in construction, but elsewhere even before the full impact of the recession, as a Manpower survey in the middle of last year made clear, showing that 44 per cent. of companies were then facing skills shortages.

That is just one of many signs that either nothing is being done to tackle our problems or that what is being done, such as cutting investment and expenditure on training, will make matters worse. When, against the stark reality of what is happening to British business, we turn back to the autumn statement, it seems almost an irrelevance. Its forecasts are wildly optimistic. Such information as can with difficulty be distilled from its pages shows that the prescription it offers by way of a public spending programme suggests that the Government have learnt nothing from the folly of the 1980s.

I look for a moment at the background against which this statement is set—the state of our economy and public services, and the incompetence and waste over which the Government have presided for over a decade. At the weekend, the Prime Minister said:

"Education is at the top of my agenda."

Many people in education, particularly teachers, must wonder where he has been for the past few years. We know: he has been in the Treasury, where he has had a hand in no fewer than four autumn statements. What evidence do we find for the condition of education, which is so close to his heart? There are more than 6,000 teacher vacancies in our schools, and 20,000 teachers leave the profession every year. Capital spending is down by a third in real terms since 1982 and there is a backlog of repairs, depending on who one heeds, of between £3 billion and £4 billion in our schools. Because of the Government's dogmatic pursuit of opting out, we find continuing waste calculated at up to £600 million because opting out means that schools will be kept in existence, when the economics suggests that they should be closed.

What is the remedy offered in the autumn statement? It shows that central Government plan an increase of £77 million in real terms to set against that enormous capital backlog for all our schools. For city technology colleges, another of the Government's pet projects, there is an almost comparable increase of £50 million. The autumn statement shows that the Government plan to cut expenditure in real terms between 1990-91 and 1991-92 and to transfer the burden to local authorities. I am not sure how that fits with the plans of the Secretary of State for the Environment for the poll tax. Perhaps that is why there has been a slight hiccup. In real terms, the Government intend to spend £198 million less than they planned in the 1989 autumn statement—yet education is the issue at the top of the Prime Minister's personal agenda.

It would pay us to look a little more deeply into the record of the 1980s, during which—whatever the results over the whole period—the Government claim periods of great economic success; indeed, an economic miracle. Let us consider transport. At the end of the 1980s, every class of road is in a worse condition than at the beginning of the decade. The Hidden report following the Clapham rail crash called for £1 billion to be spent on safety measures. The Government promised the money for those safety measures, but took it back from the public sector obligations—with effects that have become increasingly clear, and about which the House has been complaining for the past few days.

Public sector housing starts at 14,000 are down 65,000 on the beginning of the decade, and the number of housing association starts has also fallen. Meanwhile, homeless households numbered more than 132,000 by 1989—*[Interruption.]* I can hear the Economic Secretary muttering. I remind him that it costs more to keep homeless people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation than it does to rehouse them. That is waste, incompetence and mismanagement by the Government, not additional spending. There is a £15 billion outstanding bill for repairs to public housing, but the number and the value of grants available for those repairs have been reduced.

The Chancellor referred to the Government's record on the national health service—something with which the country is all too familiar. Waiting lists are heading towards 1 million. Every time we debate these issues, the Government trot out rolling figures. However, when we look at the small print and consider the implications and the impact of inflation, in fact there is very much less, and often very little, for patient care. That ties in with everybody's experience of the health service—those of us who use it, anyway.

There has been a tremendous shift in resources over the economy as a whole, and in the social security budget in particular, from the less well-off to the better off. I shall pick out one example from that budget of what I consider to be an absolutely scandalous waste—the expenditure on the 2 per cent. incentive to persuade people to gamble with their retirement pensions. It is what the Government like to call the incentive for people to take out personal pensions. The costs of that now run at £600 million to £700 million a year, and by 1993 the total is likely to be £2·4 billion. That is not the knock-on cost or the effect of what happens to the national insurance fund because of the contributions that now come out of it; it is merely the additional incentive to persuade people to gamble with their retirement income. That £2·4 billion is either a waste of money because it is a good buy, or it is a scandalous exploitation of the public if it is not. As the Audit Commission said, there is a net overall cost of £6 billion.

I have lost track of how much we are pouring into the black hole of the poll tax. Is it £3 billion or £4 billion? It goes up by about £1 billion every time the Secretary of State for the Environment turns round. It is a colossal waste of money. I can tell the Government that, even if they put £15 billion into the poll tax, they will not make it popular and they will not help their electoral chances.

All those are examples of how the Government have wasted their time and our money during the 1980s, with a cumulative damage that the autumn statement fails to address. Of course, there is another matter related to their record of investment in the national interest during those years. We must consider Government spending without asset sales, because that is the best way to consider it. Even under this Government, there must come a point where there is nothing left to sell. In real terms, general Government expenditure since 1984 has been almost constant at about £200 billion at 1989-90 prices.

Let me put that another way. It means that the level of investment that the Government have been prepared to provide from the nation's earnings has not risen even during the most prosperous years to which the Government lay claim. Even during the boom years, the

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

money that they were prepared to make available from the nation's ordinary earnings, as opposed to what might be considered the windfall gains of privatisation—certainly not to be repeated—has not risen.

Now we are told that, under the new regime, the Government want to improve not only the quality but the quantity of public services. But if that is their record in the boom years, how can we possibly believe that, in the years which lie ahead, in which nobody predicts an imminent boom, the Government will repair the neglect to which those previous policies during the boom years have led and which we can so clearly identify?

Before we leave the autumn statement, let us look again at the area of spending most directly related to the recession—spending on training and industry. The plan for 1991-92 shows a cash cut of £116 million on what was spent on the outturn on training for last year. In real terms, that is a cut of £300 million in the provision that the Government are prepared to make for training.

Nor is that a one-off. Between 1989-90 and 1993-94, looking at the pattern of the Government's plan, they plan to cut £1 billion in real terms from the employment budget—26 per cent. of that budget. That is despite the fact that 62 per cent. of our industrial work force are unskilled, compared with 38 per cent. in Germany, 21 per cent. in Italy and only 20 per cent. in France.

The Government justified the cuts in last year's autumn statement by saying that it was all right to cut spending on employment and training, because unemployment was falling. We pointed out that they were cutting spending per head, but nevertheless they said that it did not matter; it was all right because unemployment was falling.

One of the few clear things to emerge from the Chancellor's speech is that even the Government do not expect unemployment to continue falling. So how come they are still cutting expenditure on the employment budget and on training? They have come up with a new reason. They now say that it is not because unemployment is falling that they are cutting expenditure; it is because they do not think that training is a good idea for the unemployed; it would be better if they had jobs. That is not quite how they put it—they use more civil service-ese. They say that training is not the most appropriate solution to the problems that the long-term unemployed face in getting back to work.

There is nothing that any of the long-term unemployed would like better than jobs. Sometimes, of course, good training might be their best option, but even then, I suspect that, if most of them were offered the option of good training or jobs, their faith has been so sapped by the Government's years of cheap exploitative training that they would probably pick the jobs.

The fact is that that option is not remotely on offer. On the most simple basis, there is about one vacancy for every 10 people unemployed, and that is before tomorrow's figures come out. Recent surveys conducted by some of my hon. Friends in the south-east suggest that there is one vacancy for every 30 people who are unemployed.

It is, to say the least, disingenuous of the Government to claim that they can cut the employment budget because the unemployed do not need training. Certainly it is a total neglect of the nation's interest. Again, that comes over from the Select Committee's remarks. Its adviser, Christopher Johnson, says:

> "Now that unemployment is rising, it is surprising that training is still being cut back . . . in view of the inability of the private sector to increase training expenditures at a time of financial pressure."

Alongside those cuts in the training budget are cuts in the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry. They amount to £250 million between 1990-91 and 1991-92 in real terms. Those cuts in training and in the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry should be restored at the earliest opportunity, and certainly within the period covered by the autumn statement. That could be done by abolishing the wasteful and damaging Government subsidy of a 2 per cent. bribe in respect of personal pensions. That would not only pay for the changes that we propose but would leave the Government with a small profit.

The Government still refuse to acknowledge the scale or the nature of the country's problems. After 12 years, they are still looking for someone else to blame. They fail to accept that, without a steady build-up in manufacturing, training, and research and development—of which there is a total lack of evidence in the autumn statement—the country will fall further and further behind its competitors.

Today is Ash Wednesday, but there is no sign of the Government wearing sackcloth and ashes. They are being worn by people throughout the country, who will find little hope in the autumn statement or in the Government's economic forecasts. The Select Committee, referring to the current account balance, remarked that an improvement will be seen as a result of a downturn in the economy, but that it may not prove sustainable when the economy recovers. The OECD report, to which the Government contributed, noted that the trade balance improvement is likely to slow and that the current external deficit may start to rise again in 1992.

We have pointed out time and again that the Government are doing nothing to tackle the economy's underlying structural problems. There is little hope for the Government in the Chancellor's remark that the recession will soon begin to ebb, so that the spending process can begin again. That is what we are all afraid of.

There is little comfort to be taken, too, from the emollient and encouraging words of the Prime Minister, who I am pleased to see in his place. Words are what he is good at, rather more so than actions. That was illustrated in respect of cold weather payments. Last week, the Chancellor announced ex-gratia payments—first for one week, then for two. However, once public attention moves on, the legislation will remain unchanged and as harsh as ever.

That is the underlying message of the autumn statement and of the debate. The same disastrous pattern as we have seen before is likely to produce the same disastrous results. The answer lies not in any change of style, but in a change of Government.

9.32 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): I am grateful for this chance to reply to the debate, which gives me my first major opportunity to speak since moving

to the Treasury. I listened with great care to almost all of today's speeches. I was sorry to miss one or two as a result of unavoidable calls away from the Chamber.

Today's debate has given right hon. and hon. Members an opportunity to discuss wider economic matters than public expenditure, which is right and proper, and to consider the valuable report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I am glad that a large number of its members, led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), are among those who have spoken. The Government's detailed response to the Select Committee's report has not featured much in today's debate, but I am sure that it was both valuable and welcomed. I was glad of the opportunity to appear before the Select Committee myself last week, in connection with burden-sharing in the Gulf, which was a most valuable hearing.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor dealt in his opening speech with a number of the principal preoccupations of those who spoke today. He has talked about the slowdown in the economy and has described our public expenditure plans, which combine prudence with significantly increased resources in key areas. He has also talked about the cost of the Gulf conflict and our success in covering these costs.

I welcome a number of the speeches made during the debate, which were supportive of what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was saying. I have already mentioned my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and I must also mention my right hon. Friends the Members for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark), and my hon. Friends the Members for Esher (Mr. Taylor) for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) and others too numerous to list.

I commend the substantive point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South. He said that, troubling though the present recession may be, it comes after a series of good years for the United Kingdom. They were years in which the Government carried through a series of fundamental reforms to the supply side of the economy: reforms to the tax regime; a major programme of deregulation; and a thorough overhaul of trade union legislation. These reforms produced a modern flexible economy, much better able to resist external shocks than it used to be, and they have greatly improved the long-term sustainable growth rate in that economy. That is a real and lasting achievement, which is not wiped away by the present recession.

Between 1981 and 1989, there were eight successive years of growth, averaging more than 3 per cent. Our economy, which during the Labour years was at the bottom of most of the leagues that we would rather have been top of, and top of most of the leagues that we would rather have been bottom of, has grown faster than that of Germany, France or Italy. Business investment grew faster than in any major industrial nation except Japan—by 43 per cent. in the three years to 1989. That surge leaves the United Kingdom better equipped to compete in world markets.

It is clear that the supply-side reforms which the Government have introduced have also led to a major improvement in labour market performance. In particular, earnings growth rose far less during the recent economic upswing than would have been expected on the basis of previous experience. I shall quote some figures to illustrate that. While unemployment fell by 1·5 million between the summer of 1986 and the spring of 1990, real earnings rose at an average rate of only 1·75 per cent., which compares with real earnings growth of 3·25 per cent. between the end of 1977 and the end of 1979, when unemployment fell by only 150,000. That is a sign of how much better the economy has been performing, and those achievements will last.

What my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said was enormously valuable. He pointed out that not merely are the Government confident about the United Kingdom economy, but so are other countries. In 1988 and 1989, Britain accounted for 39 per cent. of total inward investment in the European Community by OECD countries. France was next best, with only 14·4 per cent. Those are significant figures, showing a level of inward investment equivalent to about £25 billion a year. That is a vote of confidence. It is not merely cross-border investment within the Community, as, of the 49 per cent. of all United States direct investment overseas which went to the European Community in 1988-89, almost two thirds came to Britain. Japan has put one fifth of its overseas investment into the European Community, and we took more than 40 per cent. of that. Surely that is a vote of confidence in the United Kingdom, and it is good that other countries show confidence in us, despite the fact that the Opposition constantly talk Britain down.

The debate has provided us with the opportunity to consider the Government's plans and to have another look at the extent to which the Labour party is prepared to lift the veil on their proposals.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) seems somewhat resentful, when not embarrassed, about being called to account for Labour party policies. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who looked somewhat torpid during the speech of his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), has now come to life to intervene noisily in mine. I hope that he will use his ears as well as his mouth; I am sure that that would be to his advantage.

It might help the right hon. and learned Gentleman to bear in mind the fact that not only Conservatives are interested in what the Labour party proposes; people who are broadly in sympathy with Labour are becoming curious about the nature of its economic policy—witness Ian Aitken in *The Guardian* the other day. Mr. Aitken—not the most obvious Conservative, and not writing in the most obviously Conservative newspaper—wrote:

"the basic weakness in Labour's case against the Government . . . is . . . the essential thinness of Labour's own prescription for dealing with the crisis . . . Labour has no painless solution, and depends on showing British industry's supply-side problems as the most effective . . . means of ending inflation.

Well, I for one don't believe it. And what's more, I don't think the British people will believe it either."

Writing in the same paper just two days ago, Mr. Will Hutton—*[Interruption.]* I know that this is embarrassing for Labour Front Benchers; their farmyard noises are even more profound than usual. Mr. Hutton wrote:

"As for the parliamentary opposition parties, their call for interest rate cuts with no accompanying recognition of the economic realities is politically opportunistic and economically naive. And if you cannot come up with something now, what ideas do you have for good government?"

[Mr. David Mellor]

That was the challenge that was thrown out to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, and I do not think that he would have received many pass marks for his response.

On interest rates, we had propounded to us Monklands' law, which may be stated thus: whatever the level of interest rates at any given time, ask for them to be 1 per cent. lower. To the surprise of some of those present, that proved on examination to be true—even at the point when, in 1988, interest rates were down to 7·5 per cent. With a candour to which he, with his lawyer's obfuscation, is not often given, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was ready to admit that he thought that the rates should have been even lower then.

Mr. John Smith: Is the Chief Secretary not a lawyer as well?

Mr. Mellor: It takes one to know one, and we know them very well. I could tell when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was falling back on quarter sessions badinage to avoid having to face up to a difficult point.

Mr. Smith: The Chief Secretary is doing the same.

Mr. Mellor: No; I am trying to set myself higher standards. The right hon. and learned Gentleman must be patient with me.

Monklands' law is suspended only when the Government actually do what the right hon. and learned Gentleman asks: thus, today's reduction of 0·5 per cent. is greeted as being too little, too late. As for the full 1 per cent. reduction that was made in October, although the right hon. and learned Gentleman had called for it in September, by January he was terming it inept.

There is a serious point here. What does Monklands' law tell us about the sincerity of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's commitment to the exchange rate mechanism? On 9 January, he was extremely forthright. Speaking on "Newsnight," he said:

"We strongly believe that Britain should be in the ERM, and we are willing to accept the disciplines that involves."

His use of the word "disciplines" must mean that the right hon. and learned Gentleman accepts the requirement to keep interest rates within the bounds of the ERM. What is the point of a commitment to the ERM if it does not mean that?

Interestingly—the right hon. and learned Gentleman will correct me if I am wrong—although there has been the expected criticism from the Labour Back Benches of the level at which we chose to enter the ERM, it did not find its place in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech. He did not say that it was too high a rate. I can do no better than quote the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) who called for high interest rates, oblivious or uncaring of the effect that they would have on Labour's commitment to membership of the ERM, suggesting that Labour's commitment to the ERM was simply an opportunistic debating device to get the party out of a difficult argument on inflation and did not amount to any realistic comment.

High interest rates are needed to curb demand and bear down on inflation. Although regrettable, they will remain high for as long as necessary, but, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made clear, for no longer than that. There is proof today of our sincerity on that.

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. and learned Friend said that interest rates will be kept up as long as is necessary. Does that mean as long as is necessary to get inflation right down or as long as is necessary to maintain the value of the pound in the ERM?

Mr. Mellor: I enjoyed my right hon. Friend's contribution to the debate, but I do not see those two as alternatives. Our position within the ERM permits us to bear down on inflation and permits convergence with lower European rates of inflation. It is a means to an end. That is the basis on which the Government proceed.

Mr. Budgen: If the purpose is to get rid of inflation as quickly as possible, why have interest rates not risen to 20 per cent.? That would do the trick, would it not?

Mr. Mellor: Because, as my hon. Friend will know and welcome, we are making progress on inflation, so it is not necessary to do so. *[Interruption.]* I thought that that was a direct and clear statement, but perhaps I am biased.

If my hon. Friends will allow me, I should like to return to the policies of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. He took exception to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said when he told us: "If it isn't hurting, it isn't working." That led me to ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman, bearing in mind the helpful observations of Mr. Ian Aitken, where we can find the pain-free solutions. The right hon. and learned Gentleman thought that that was a huge joke and spoke even more as if he were at the assizes. He delighted some of his less critical hon. Friends by suggesting, huff puff, that that was the most naive question that any Minister had asked him in 10 years and, huff puff, "How could anyone ask such a foolish thing?".

Many people read and are influenced by *The Guardian*. Labour-voting journalists on *The Guardian* are saying, "We know about the bull but where's the beef?". They are saying, "Where are the pain-free solutions and what are the answers to the questions?". The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East may be able to avoid answering today, but, as the general election approaches, he will not be able to do so. We will keep asking, and he will have to answer.

I shall ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman three questions that bear on this matter in case they cause as much hilarity to him as the earlier intervention. How can inflation be reduced without cutting demand? How can demand be reduced without measures to raise savings and reduce borrowing, and how can the level of borrowing be controlled without influencing its price? Those are all questions to which we are striving to find an answer.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has no answer except—this was astonishing—dragging on the trail of the deadest of dead cats: credit controls. Well may the right hon. and learned Gentleman look back nostalgically to the days of the corset and all those other restrictions, but that does not deal with the fundamental point, which is that demand cannot be restricted by restricting the availability of money—all that does is push up the price of the money that is available. It is utterly naive to expect any pain-free answers to the problems of the inflation rate and excessive demand in imposing credit controls that will move in exactly the opposite direction.

Are we to look back nostalgically to the days of the 1970s, when people were queuing up for mortgages as a result of credit controls? *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and

learned Member for Monklands, East is busy changing the subject and avoiding all eye contact with me, but I shall try to keep up with him. His position on credit controls is not particularly funny, because he thinks that they are a way of dealing with demand—I do not believe they are—and he says that he does not want to go back to the 1970s, when mortgages were limited: he wants to exempt them altogether. But how can credit controls bear down on private borrowing, when 85 per cent. of private borrowing is done in the form of mortgages? So the dead cat is a dead parrot, and it will not work. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer that."] My right hon. and hon. Friends must be patient; the right hon. and learned Gentleman will have a chance to answer on other occasions.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman might point to the Opposition's supply side measures, which involve increased spending on training, research and development and regional policy, all commitments which trip lightly off the tongue of the hon. Member for Derby, South, who also claims that Labour has only two pledges. What the Opposition propose is not a supply side policy: it is a programme of industrial intervention, regulation and higher public spending dressed up in new rhetorical clothes. All the policies that failed in the 1970s have been dragged out to be given an opportunity, which I suspect the public will deny them, to be allowed to fail again—

Mr. John Smith: What about some eye contact with my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)?

Mr. Mellor: I confess that that would be a much more pleasurable experience. I shall look the hon. Lady in the eye when I come to Beckett's law, promulgated on 13 February 1990:

"What we are promising is an increase for pensions and . . . child benefit. Everything else that is regarded as a desirable aim is also listed, quite clearly and specifically, as something that we hope to do as resources allow."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 1990; Vol. 167, c. 179.]

Some laws last for generations, even for hundreds of years. Beckett's law is looking a little sorry for itself after less than one year. Opposition spokesmen, led by the Leader of the Opposition, as we might expect, have been queueing up to say that, far from there being only two priorities, everything is a priority. The Leader of the Opposition said about health only in December:

"In this country now there is a strong mandate for using available public resources for the public good, and in their order of priorities the British people give top place to the need to invest in the health services. We shall honour their mandate."

How does Beckett's law look in the light of that? Health was not one of her priorities.

Next, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said:

"Education is our first priority."

No, said the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), shadow Secretary of State, drawing herself up to her full height. She wanted

"to see Britain reach the UN aid target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP as top priority."

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said:

"They"—

the Conservatives—

"say: we cannot train until the economy succeeds. Wrong. The opposite is true. The economy cannot succeed until we train."

Appreciating that Beckett's law needed fresh life breathed into it, it was restated today by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, but within three or four minutes he had broken the law himself by saying that Labour would make training a priority——

Mr. John Smith *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mellor: Oh yes he did—*Hansard* will make that clear. All my hon. Friends heard the right hon. and learned Gentleman say that.

We are left with a return to the policies of yesterday, yet the Labour party brings before us an amendment that severely criticises the Government's record and states that the Government should find policies that promote

"the recovery of a wealth creating economy".

We all know where people were in terms of wealth creation after five years of the last Labour Government—living standards did not rise at all.

It may be worth recalling a few telling statistics to show the validity of what the Labour party says in its amendment. A man on average earnings with a non-income-earning wife is £58 a week better off in real terms after 10 years of Conservative Government; he was lucky if he was £1 a week better off after five years of Labour Government. Share ownership has increased threefold since 1979, and one in four of the British public own shares. Between 1979 and 1988, the real wealth of all groups in society increased by, on average, 60 per cent. Interestingly and most tellingly on wealth, taking £5,000 at constant 1988 prices, in 1988 some 7·5 million more people than in 1979 had assets of more than £5,000, yet the Labour party purports to believe that a Labour Government could create wealth better than we can.

Let us look at national wealth, at the state of our overseas assets. At the end of 1979, after five years of Labour government, our net overseas assets totalled just £12·4 billion, or 5·5 per cent. of gross domestic product. However, at the end of 1989, they had grown to £112·5 billion, or 21 per cent. of GDP. With the greatest respect to the Labour party, I am not sure how many lessons on wealth creation we need from it.

Labour's amendment

"condemns the failure of the Government to invest in the economic infrastructure and in vital public services".

Nothing could be further from the truth. For example, the new plans for the coming year show that capital spending on motorways and trunk roads is more than double, in real terms, what it was in 1979-80. Under the last Labour Government, it fell by 40 per cent. In 1989-90, investment on British Rail was 32 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979.

Labour Members referred to safety, rightly. The sum of about £750 million is to be spent on safety by BR and London Transport over the next three years. Between 1978-79 and 1989-90, health authorities' gross capital spending increased by 46 per cent. in real terms and the new plans provide for the Government's contribution to increase by £180 million, or 8 per cent. in real terms, on top of existing plans for a gross programme of more than £1·75 billion of capital investment in the national health service.

Once again, what the Labour party has asked of us parts company with reality. Everywhere one looks, one finds criticisms that are ill-directed and wide of the mark. There are criticisms of our record on training, yet we are spending 2·5 times as much on training as the Labour Government did. Unemployment doubled under the Labour Government, but the unemployed then did not have access to employment training, restart programmes

[Mr. Mellor]

or job clubs and had no specialist advice on how to get back to work. All that has come about under a Conservative Government.

We were even criticised by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) for our cuts in employment training. The 1988 Labour conference voted against employment training and called on Labour councils not to co-operate with it.

Wherever one looks, what one sees in the economy today are public finances that are stronger than ever before and the real achievement of the 1980s on which we can build, with a difficult short-term situation that the Government will be capable of dealing with. The Opposition have no policies whatsoever.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 216, Noes 321.

Division No. 64] **[8.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Neillist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon

Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gryils, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8th November 1990; commends the Government on its determination to maintain downward pressure on inflation and to build on the great improvements in economic performance over the last eleven years; and welcomes the Government's continued tight control of public expenditure coupled with improved value for money and its provision of additional resources for key areas.

Revenue Support Grant (Scotland)

Mr. Speaker: I understand that there will be four Front-Bench spokesmen. May I ask them to be brief so that more Back Benchers may have an opportunity to participate in the debate? May I also ask Back Benchers to limit their speeches to five minutes so that as many as possible may be called?

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I beg to move,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991, dated 28th January 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

I had hoped that it would be possible to deal also with the second revenue support grant order to distribute an extra £16·5 million grant to certain authorities which suffered a shortfall of non-domestic rate income in 1989-90. However, because of complications that have been discussed with the hon. Members for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) and Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), in the light of representations from that district council, it will not be possible to lay and debate that order until next month. I hope that the arrangements which we propose, including the details of that order, will have the consent of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, with which we are consulting.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): On behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and myself, may I thank the Minister for his statement and for listening to the representations which we made to him? I am sure that the poll tax payers in Cunninghame will be happy with the announcement.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generous comments. No doubt the mood of amity that he has set will continue throughout the debate.

The order before the House marks the final stage of the local government settlement for 1991-92, details of which were first announced to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) on 25 July. My right hon. and learned Friend indicated at that stage that aggregate external finance for 1991-92 had been set at £4,338 million, an increase of £410 million, or 10·4 per cent. over the corresponding figure for 1990-91. He also confirmed, as hon. Members will recall, that an additional £15 million would be provided to those local authorities which, since 1989-90, had benefited from the RSG safety net, thus making the total of Government-determined support for local authorities for next year £4,353 million.

It may be helpful to the House if I explain that the figure of £4,353 million has three components. The first is non-domestic rate income. On the basis of the rate poundages which my right hon. Friend announced on 23 January, and which are prescribed in the Non-Domestic Rate (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 1991, we estimate that the total level of non-domestic rate income in 1991-92 will be £1,347 million. This figure takes into account the reduction of £100 million which my right hon. Friend announced on 17 January as the second stage of our policy of harmonising rate poundages north and south of the border.

The second component of aggregate external finance is the provision for specific grants which will be paid in 1991-92. This is estimated at £313 million. The third component is revenue support grant which, for 1991-92, totals £2,692·6 million, including the £15 million for safety netting.

The purpose of the order is to specify how that total amount of revenue support grant is allocated among local authorities. A full explanation of how those resources have been distributed to authorities is contained in the report to the order, the details of which are fairly complex. However, broadly, there are two stages in the process. First, an amount is distributed among authorities in order to equalise differences in their grant-aided expenditure, which is determined by the client group assessment methodology which, as hon. Members know, is kept under constant review, in consultation with COSLA. The rest of the available support, with the exception of the £15 million safety netting, is distributed on a per capita basis. The safety netting has been distributed to——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Minister said that the allocations were agreed in consultation with COSLA. I do not wish to detract from the good services that COSLA produces, but is it not correct to say that the Government have a direct relationship with each local authority in Scotland and not exclusively with COSLA? Will the Minister acknowledge that the Government sometimes seem prepared to hide behind agreements with COSLA, rather than enter into negotiations with individual authorities, that are not always as happy as COSLA is with the allocations? That is true not least of Grampian regional council, which feels victimised because much late debt has recently been calculated and the COSLA formula does not meet its requirements.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is, in a sense, right. It is always possible that individual authorities will take a different view of a particular formula. However, successive Governments have accepted that it is right to consult COSLA collectively, through the distribution committee, which is the basis of the system. That is not to say that the Government will not take heed of individual representations made to them by hon. Members on behalf of specific authorities. However, the technical formulas are discussed between the professional advisers of COSLA and the Department.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: In the light of what Mr. Speaker said, I do not want to give way too often However, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), as he is a past president of COSLA.

Mr. Clarke: Will the Minister clarify a doubt in my mind? Did he say that consultations are being held with COSLA that have not yet been completed or has COSLA agreed to the formula that he is presenting?

Mr. Stewart: There have been technical consultations between the distribution committee, which involves COSLA, and my Department. Those are on-going and, as the hon. Gentleman will know, there are constant representations from individual authorities which are taken into account in the continuing work of the distribution committee. With regard to the other order to which I referred, consultations are continuing with COSLA and have not yet been completed. The main

beneficiaries of the safety net remain Strathclyde region and Glasgow district, which will receive an additional £8·5 million and £5·2 million respectively.

The one component for which the settlement specifically does not provide is to cover any shortfall of income that local authorities may face because of non-collection of the community charge.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: I have already given way three times. I shall give way for the last time to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Darling: When dealing with the allocation of grant, the Minister said that a complicated formula was involved. Why does Lothian, which spends less than the Scottish average per head, receive £799 per head in grant, whereas Strathclyde receives £919 and Tayside £915? Is it not the case that, in terms of the grant it receives per head, Lothian was discriminated against under the old rates system and is now being discriminated against under the poll tax system? Are not the Government hiding behind a formula and discriminating against Edinburgh and Lothian to manipulate matters for their own political advantage?

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the figures. He will see that the aggregate external finance for Lothian for the forthcoming year is increased by 12·88 per cent. That is substantially more than the Scottish average.

Last summer, and again in its briefing notes for this debate, COSLA argued that the settlement should take account of the non-collection factor. I emphasise that, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) met the convention in July, he wholly rejected its argument. He made it clear that, as a matter of principle, the Government were not prepared to take non-collection into account in establishing the level of Government support for local authorities. To do so would mean that national taxpayers would be asked to subsidise those who were refusing to pay their community charge. That would be resented, and rightly so, by taxpayers and would simply encourage non-collection.

I emphasise that collection is the responsibility of the authorities. It is clear that they could and should have made more effective and speedier use of the recovery procedures available to them. That is not simply the Government's opinion. Another recent report on the first year of the operation of the community charge in Scotland, that of the Accounts Commission—which is a wholly independent body—supports that view. In its report the commission referred to

> "The apparent unwillingness on the part of certain collecting authorities to make full and timeous use of the recovery procedures available to them under statute."

The commission also stated:

> "Some authorities have inhibited the effectiveness of sheriff officers' procedures through the manner in which community charge payers were informed of the possibility or imminence of recovery action."

It is disconcerting that certain authorities have seemed reluctant to provide the authority for sheriff officers to conduct their normal recovery procedures in appropriate cases.

Let the House be clear that much more can and should be done by authorities to reduce non-collection levels. To give credit where it is due, I welcome the decisions by Grampian region to proceed with warrant sales. No doubt the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) will welcome the U-turn by certain Labour councillors in Grampian which has enabled that to happen, as reported in today's press.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: I have already given way four times.

Mr. Dewar: There is a great deal of interest in attitudes towards dealing with non-payment. The Minister was a vehement advocate of the removal of all services from those in arrears. Is that still his position?

Mr. Stewart: That was never my position.

I welcome the decision by Strathclyde regional council to arrest the wages and salaries of its staff who are non-payers. Those steps are long overdue, but nevertheless welcome.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister is misleading the House. He may not be doing so deliberately, but he was the very person who advocated that all services and the right to vote should be withdrawn from those who either could not or would not pay their poll tax. Yet he has just denied that. He is misleading the House and should correct that statement.

Mr. Stewart: If the hon. Gentleman checks the press on that specific point, he will discover that Mr. Phil Gallie made the suggestion.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The Minister made the suggestion. Mr. Gallie is a disciple.

Mr. Stewart: It was made clear that neither I nor the Scottish Office generally agreed with that at all.

Law-abiding charge payers rightly resent those who on the one hand are only too happy to accept employment, wages and salaries from local authorities, while on the other they are not prepared to contribute to the cost of local services. It certainly does not help the non-collection problems to have the president of COSLA call for the speedy abolition of the community charge. Such a statement is the height of irresponsibility. COSLA knows full well that, whatever the outcome of the community charge review, authorities will have a statutory duty to continue to collect the charge. Those remarks will simply encourage non-payment. I must make it clear that, whatever happens, there will be no amnesty for non-payers. The Government certainly will not bail out local authorities because of their failure to collect the community charge.

When we announced the settlement last July, my right hon. and learned Friend described it as fair. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) said, it was very close to the bid made by COSLA. In view of the reduction in the rate of inflation during recent months, and the likelihood of the rate falling significantly this year, I think that it is not unreasonable now to describe the settlement as extremely fair. I certainly reject any suggestion by local authorities that the quite outrageous community charge increases—which represent a high degree of political cynicism—many of them made are due to underfunding by the Government. That is not the case.

I commend the order to the House.

10.31 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): There is no doubt that we are facing a crisis of credibility in local government finance. The poll tax for 1991-92 will be seen by many people as a crushing burden and it will be resented. A couple living on an ordinary working wage, but who are outwith the rebate net, will be between £800 and £1,100 worse off, depending on geography. That is a substantial imposition.

This year the average increase in poll tax bills was 9 per cent.; in the coming year it is likely to be a thumping 28 or 29 per cent. on average across Scotland. I know that many people will ask, fairly, what has gone wrong and what is to be done about it. I have to say to the Minister that I believe that the fault lies with the system itself and that I have little sympathy with his expressions of outrage. He was well warned by COSLA and everyone in the local authority world, months and months ago, that settlements would be of that order. I know that the immediate reaction of Conservative Ministers is to talk about profligate councillors, overspending and fiscal irresponsibility. That does not stand up as an explanation of what has happened.

I recommend to the Minister the results of a survey published in the current issue of the *Municipal Journal*. It shows that the average increase in budgets in cash terms for local authorities in Scotland for the coming year is 8·4 per cent. So the budgets are being cut in real terms, yet there is a substantial increase in the poll tax. It is not the result of wildly escalating budgets; in fact, local authorities have often painfully done their bit. The trouble is the inheritance from the past mismanagement of the local government finance system and the present settlement. The Minister's indignation simply does not carry conviction.

The hopes expressed by Ministers for this year's settlement have always been optimistic. The aggregate external finance has risen by about 10 per cent., but that was never likely to stabilise the position, and Ministers knew that. Indeed, on the settlement figures that the Government have used, the difference between expenditure as anticipated by Government and loan charges, less the aggregate external finance, leaves a gap to be filled by the poll tax of £1·094 billion. That is a substantial increase of 16·3 per cent. on the gap that had to be filled in the previous year. To put it another way, even on the Government's own figures, leaving aside all the difficulties that they nodded through and did not comment on or take into account, the hard-pressed poll tax payer has to find another £154 million, or £45 per individual payer.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is quoting from the COSLA brief, but COSLA has simply got it wrong. The 16·3 per cent. is based on the assumption that levels of the community charge in 1991 were based on grant-aided expenditure, but they were not. They were based on budgeted expenditure which, on average, was 7 per cent. below the GAE for 1991-92. To spend to the 1991-92 figure, an increase of 7 per cent. in support would have been required. If that had been all that had been given by the Government and no other influences had played a part, community charge increases would simply have been at the level of inflation.

Mr. Dewar: I would want to study that arithmetical sleight of hand. All that I have done is to take the current expenditure—I make no apology for the fact that I have relied on COSLA's figures here; that is perfectly legitimate—and the loan charges, totalled them and removed the aggregate external finance. That leaves us with the gap to which I referred of £1·094 billion. That is a perfectly fair representation.

I return to the general point, which the Minister has not answered. Why, if average budgets have risen by less than the rate of inflation, has the poll tax risen by such an enormous sum? Does that not have a great deal to do with the unsatisfactory nature of the system, where the gearing effect means that any increased expenditure will be put on a narrow tax base, with the result that the poll tax payer will be victimised again and again?

For example, if one takes a legitimate increase, such as the almost £1 million that a large region has spent on school boards, or the £1 million that it has managed to gather together to do something to maintain the momentum of community care—presumably the Minister does not contend that all expenditure is wicked—that, put on the narrow base of the poll tax, is contributing to quite unreasonable increases.

It is a side effect of the fact that councils control only 20 per cent. of their income and 80 per cent. of it is now controlled by the Government, which is built into the system, that, every time the Government lay a new duty, whether it be the litter laws or some educational provision, or every time there is a drift in wage settlements, which may be outwith the control of local government, the poll tax will inevitably be forced up unreasonably, because it will increase the gap between the non-domestic rate income and the revenue support grant income, which is entirely controlled by Government. That is one reason why we are in such trouble.

Of course, there are other complications. There are the interest charges that were underestimated this year and the rises that could not be anticipated. There are such matters as the use of surpluses last year, which I understand were about £105 million, but those have now been exhausted. The Minister looks as though that was the fault of local government, but it did its best to protect the poll tax payer, and what is wrong with that? If he showed the same wish to protect the poll tax payer and maintain a decent level of services, we would all be in a much better position.

But there is also the problem that we cannot duck, of non-payment and the cost of collection. I take an example which, from my point of view, is a difficult one because of the size of the poll tax that has been levied. Lothian region's poll tax this year is £420, plus £26 for water rates—an increase of almost 35 per cent. It sounds like a case study which the Government should welcome, because it would illustrate, presumably, the particular and peculiar irresponsibility of that local authority.

In fact, as we all know, it has cut £20 million from its budget by increasing charges for home helps and school meals and by making staff reductions, which are painful and difficult. We know also that much of the net expenditure, the new expenditure, that has been included is for things such as school boards and care in the community. At the end of the day, it is faced with a budget increase that is just about the rate of inflation, but with an overall increase of 35 per cent.

One reason is the cost of collecting the poll tax, which will be £18 million next year. Even allowing for inflation, that is three times as much as the cost of collection under the rating system. In 1989-90, there was 13 per cent. non-payment, and in 1990-91 that figure will increase to

38 per cent. I have no doubt that that percentage will sharply decrease, but it is one problem with which the authority has to wrestle. That has led to the Lothian authority taking some unpopular decisions, but I have no doubt that they have been taken with the approval of the Secretary of State. Even now, £48 of the £109 increase is the result of non-payment.

Every authority, irrespective of political complexion, is faced with the problem of non-payment. The regions that are not under the control of the Labour party are confronted by it because of the difficulties that are built into the system. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said, Lothian spends less per head on services than the average in Scotland, but despite that it levies a high poll tax. That is because its grant per head is so much less than the Scottish average. Indeed, it is less than that of every other region. Lothian has a shortfall by inheritance, and that is the main reason for its problems. It is shamelessly ducking the issue to talk about 12·55 per cent. this year, given what has happened in previous years. I believe that the Minister knows that. He did himself no credit by avoiding the issue when challenged in an intervention.

I am sure that none of my hon. Friends is unaware of or doubts the difficulties of local authorities, including that of non-collection. There has been feverish speculation about non-collection, and it is my clear recollection—if I am wrong about this, I shall apologise—that, only a few months ago, the Minister, as a Conservative Back-Bencher, was reported in the *Glasgow Herald* as calling with vehemence for acceptance of the principle that those who did not pay should have services withdrawn. I have no doubt that I am right about that. I shall check and then write to the Minister. I think that he knows that I am right, and I think that he owes the House an apology.

I recognise, of course, the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman faces. He is a Minister now, and he must forswear many of his personal opinions. Given what he has said in the recent past as a Conservative Back-Bench Member, however, he should make it clear that he is putting his irresponsible views behind him in recognition of the discipline of office. That would be some help. It would be useful also if he were to repudiate the views of the demonstrators on the Mound—perhaps it was more of a photo-opportunity than a demonstration—who suggested that Conservatives should not pay the full poll tax but should reduce their payments by what they understood to be the so-called surcharge for non-payment.

I note that a gentleman called the Rev. Roderick D. M. Campbell——

Mr. Allan Stewart: If the hon. Gentleman undertakes a perusal of a front-page article in the *Glasgow Herald*, he will find that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I made it clear at a Conservative party conference—a public occasion—that in no circumstances would we condone or encourage any person to break the law of the land.

Mr. Dewar: I accept that. I am glad to have the assurance that the Rev. Roderick Campbell is being repudiated. I hope that he will not bring the same irresponsibility to his newly confirmed appointment as a member of the Greater Glasgow health board. I can think only that that is some sort of reward for his honest efforts on behalf of the Conservative party. It is important that we are clear where the Minister stands, and I hope that we shall have some correspondence on the matter.

Perhaps we shall also have an opportunity, when the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) speaks, to clear up the position of the Scottish National party. I see in the *Glasgow Herald* today that its immediate ex-leader, Mr. Gordon Wilson, is saying that the party should restrict its non-payment campaign to year one of the tax.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): It was in yesterday's *Glasgow Herald*.

Mr. Dewar: Yesterday—I am grateful to the hon. Member. There have been a series of ambiguous statements from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), but there is no doubt that the public are very fed up with the policy of the Scottish National party, and I look forward to finding out what the exact position is today, in the hope that it may still be the same tomorrow, and then we may learn exactly where they stand.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has been reduced to a position of great dignity, if he can hope only that the Secretary of State for the Environment will do just about enough to get him off the hook on which he has been impaled.

I shall finish by saying that of course we are all victims of the system. Councils are certainly the victims of the system, as are the people whom they represent. Above all, so are the public, in the form of the poll tax payers. We are in the unfortunate position that, if the Government's attitude does not change, the cry remains, "Not a penny more", and if the non-payment campaign is rashly and irresponsibly maintained, despite the effects on jobs and services, people will be in the impossible position of seeing their poll tax rise out of control, or facing the most vicious and fundamental attack on the level of services that we have ever witnessed. That is a dilemma which I do not wish any elected Member of Parliament to have to face, and from which I do not wish the public to suffer.

I am sure that the Minister recognises that, even in Eastwood, there are people who depend on services. There are people who depend entirely on home helps and on a whole range of education and social work services provided by local government who will suffer greatly if the sort of cuts implied by Government rhetoric are made. The system has been discredited and the harsh realism of the figures—a very substantial increase, well above the local authority budgets this year—underlines that point.

The Secretary of State, who has chosen to sit out this debate, has proclaimed that the poll tax system is working well and is a remarkable success story. He is the Minister who has talked of minor changes and of a tax which, in essence, is here to stay. I find that deeply depressing, when I consider the damage that has been done. I have no doubt that Ministers will say little enough today, and probably for quite some time, about their plans for the future. What about the suggestions that expenditure on education should be moved to the Treasury, or that there should be a return to some sort of property-based system? They may find favour with the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). We shall have to wait and see where his intellectual journey will end, but I repeat my warning to

[Mr. Dewar]

Ministers that Scotland will not accept an ingenious but dishonest compromise that merely repackages the unacceptable in a vain effort to save political face.

10.48 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) probably spoke for the whole House when he asked, "What has gone wrong?" There is no question that something has gone desperately wrong. However, he seemed to ignore the contribution that has been made by his party and by the Scottish National party in Scotland to non-collection of the tax. Anyone who believes that any taxation, or local authority charges, that Members of Parliament and councillors have told people not to pay, will not run into administrative difficulties, is not living in the real world.

The hon. Member for Garscadden has to bear in mind that his party and people sitting beside him on the Front Bench, campaigned not to pay. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who? Point to them". Memories appear to be very short. They campaigned not to register and not to pay—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] If the memory of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) is really so short, let me remind him that he was the leader of the campaign. It seems that his memory is indeed short: he does not want to remember.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Walker: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I will happily give way to him in a moment.

The hon. Member for Garscadden chastised my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, suggesting that, because he now sat on the Front Bench, he was somehow dissociating himself from views that he had expressed earlier. Let me remind the hon. Gentleman that his hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North, who is sitting beside him on the Opposition Front Bench, has made some fascinating comments both as a Back Bencher and as a Front Bencher. Now I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Wilson: There is always the danger of dignifying the hon. Gentleman's remarks by responding to them, but, as he has mentioned me, let me put the record straight.

I have consistently opposed non-payment for political reasons, and I certainly did not urge people not to register: I urged them, while registering, to make plain their opposition to the poll tax. I have urged people to register, to claim their rebates and to pay at every level. If the hon. Gentleman has an argument, let him put it, but why he has to base it on mendacity is beyond me.

Mr. Walker: I shall resort to the tactics and methods of the hon. Member for Garscadden——

Mr. Dewar: What?

Mr. Walker: If I am wrong, I shall apologise.

Mr. Wilson: Is that the end of it?

Mr. Walker: I am giving as much evidence as the hon. Member for Garscadden gave. In such a short debate, I cannot be expected to do other than emulate the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Front Benchers do not like it. They want to retain the delightful amnesia that enables them to forget not only their own position, but that of their hon. Friends who still sit on the Benches behind them. They paid up only recently, because they were told they must; until that time, they had campaigned consistently against doing so. Even now, some claim that they have somehow destroyed the system.

I agree with the Accounts Commission, which says that recovery procedures have not been adopted either properly or effectively. I do not find that surprising. In Angus district, in my constituency, the Scottish National party is the collector on behalf of Tayside region. Councillors there are telling people that they should not pay. In the circumstances, it would be astonishing if some did not listen to and act on that advice—and, of course, the advice given by parliamentary members of the same party.

These are the people who claim that they want to be the voice of Scotland, and, at some future date, the Government of Scotland. How can they possibly aspire to govern when they are not prepared to accept the taxes and charges levied as a result of statutes passed by a democratically elected Parliament?

When we consider the average increase represented by the community charge, and the 10·4 per cent. increase mentioned in the order, we see only too well that something is very wrong. The hon. Member for Garscadden may be right in one respect: I believe that whatever levy local authorities place on individuals should be one that those individuals consider reasonable. I have written my paper and stand by it and I believe that much more should be collected by central Government. There will be arguments and debates about what methods should be used and how it is done, but more should be collected centrally and less collected locally.

The local collection should be pitched at a level at which people recognise that they are making a contribution, but not so large that it becomes a penal burden. That is why we have to look at the matter in depth, and I welcome the review taking place now.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): If those additional burdens were taken by central Government, what would be the effect on national taxation?

Mr. Walker: I hope that I was making, clear that, if the burden is transferred from local level to national level, it still has to be paid for. If the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has read any of the papers that I have produced, he will realise that I wish to transfer that to value added tax, which is a central tax.

Whatever comes out of this debate, I hope that it will be one of the last such debates, if not the last, that we shall have.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the poll tax will be gone?

Mr. Walker: No. I believe in the community charge, but local authorities should be able to fix it at a level necessary to meet the needs of the services in their area. The hon. Member for Garscadden put his finger on an important point when he said that, if one has to add figures to a small percentage, it must increase the cost substantially in a small area.

Mr. Maxton: Some of us pointed that out to the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues during the Committee stage of the 1987 Bill. He did not learn the lesson then. I am

grateful for the fact that he seems to have learnt the lesson now, but it would have been better if he had voted against it then.

Mr. Walker: Like that of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, the memory of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) is very selective. I have always taken the view that local collection must be at a level that makes people recognise and accept that they are making their contribution to local government expenditure, but it must be a realistic level that people will accept. Bills approaching £450 or £500 are far too high and something must be done.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan) *rose*——

Mr. Walker: I have given way enough.

The problem faced by Opposition Members is that they are living with the results of two separate campaigns. One campaign was the legal campaign by the Scottish nationalists. At one end of my constituency, even the Perth and Kinross district SNP provost did not support that, whereas it was supported at the other end of my constituency. *[Interruption.]* The Labour party has to answer to the people of Scotland for the 29 per cent. increase in the community charge.

Mr. Harry Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you use the powers of the Chair to stop these electrifying speeches?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): We had better get on with the debate.

10.59 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The speech of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) came to a suitably abrupt end, and not before time.

Many of us have been through these debates before. It is sometimes difficult to find something new to say, but the hon. Member for Tayside, North gave us a brilliant idea to which we can perhaps look forward. He said that he hoped that this was the last debate of this kind that we should ever have in the House. It seemed to imply that there should be no revenue support grant at all in the future. Perhaps that was a revelation of the way in which Tory party thinking is moving.

The Minister said that this was a reasonably generous settlement and that there was no reason for a dramatic increase in the poll tax, because local authorities were getting a settlement broadly in line with inflation. If I am not mistaken, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) did not fundamentally dispute that; the point that he disputed concerned the way in which the burden falls on the poll tax payer; because of its fixed element, it is the only area of taxation that is flexible for local authorities. It does not need much intellectual power to understand that, when an authority has a shortfall in expenditure or faces unexpected extra costs, it has a disproportionate effect on poll tax payers because all the money must be recovered from that one component of revenue, although it accounts for only one quarter of the total tax base of local authorities.

I ask the Minister to consider the pleas that I have received from local authorities about the timing of this settlement. Timing is a problem every year, but it seems to have become more acute. It is extremely difficult for local authorities to fix budgets in which a major component is not determined until—if they are lucky—the day before the budget must be presented, and often not until a day or two after the budget has been fixed.

I can confirm that I received a fax this morning from Gordon district council pointing out that it determined its budget on the basis of information about what it expected the revenue support grant to be; but the information was wrong to the tune of £21,000, which the council had to draw from surpluses. The Minister seems to deplore the idea of maintaining balances, but this is a good example of why they are a necessary and perfectly legitimate component of local authorities' budgets—to ensure that they have the flexibility to cope with unexpected fluctuations in the demands made on them.

Am I right in deducing that this is a case of the tail, in the shape of the Department of the Environment, wagging the Scottish Office dog? The settlement in England comes two months later than that in Scotland. The new leadership of the Tory party gave a clear sign that more money would be available, so local authorities in Scotland had to determine their poll taxes against that background, and they had much less time to play with.

I understand that the Secretary of State had to consider whether re-billing would have been necessary for Scottish authorities in circumstances in which it would not have been necessary for English authorities. I ask the Minister to bring forward the timing of the allocation of the grants, so as to enable local authorities to plan their budgets in good time.

Earlier, the Minister outlined his concerns about the relationship between the Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I am not attacking COSLA; it does an essential job well. I appreciate its value, but it often has to adopt a consensus position in which the interests of all local authority members are not necessarily represented. Authorities in COSLA that are in a minority, politically or geographically, tend to lose out to the majority view. They have a right, however, to expect to make direct approaches to the Scottish Office and to have their anxieties dealt with, and not to expect that the COSLA formula is the be-all and end-all of the settlement.

This is not the first time that I have made this plea. I have had to point out several times to the House how local authorities in my area and in other parts of Scotland have been adversely affected. The Scottish Office has not been willing to find a solution to accommodate those authorities. It should try harder to do so in the future.

We are moving into an era of change. The Government know my view that the poll tax is not reformable and that the sooner it is abolished the better. I hope that they will take to heart my belief that the sooner they are able to say categorically that the poll tax will go and that a new, fairer system will be introduced, the quicker we will be able to resolve the outstanding anomalies faced by local authorities under the present regime.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) castigated members of the Labour and Scottish National parties for their militant non-payment stance. I am getting letters from my constituents telling me that they wholly endorse the position of the Scottish Conservative party in encouraging them to withhold payment of the part of this year's increased poll tax that is caused by non-payment. I represent the only party that has not encouraged people not to pay the poll tax. Ministers should be a little careful.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I made the position of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Government crystal clear—in no circumstances do the Government condone or encourage anyone in Scotland to break the law.

Mr. Bruce: I accept that point, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not deny that active members of his party do that. They do not appear to be disciplined or to be called to account in any way——

Mr. Wilson: They are appointed to Greater Glasgow health board.

Mr. Bruce: They are promoted by the junior Scottish Office Minister.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I agree with the hon. Member. A properly endorsed, prospective parliamentary candidate in Edinburgh, South, Councillor Struan Stevenson, is one of the leaders of the campaign to encourage people not to pay the additional part of the poll tax. Surely Ministers should renounced him and he should be deselected.

Mr. Bruce: The Minister heard that comment and can respond later.

This tax is proving to be an extremely difficult constraint on local authorities, preventing them from providing the services that they are required to provide and, in most cases, are striving honourably to provide. It is administratively difficult to collect the tax. It is difficult to budget when the Government continually impose extra responsibilities on local authorities without always providing the necessary money and when the settlement on which local authority budgets must be based is sometimes made after those budgets have been set. We are legitimately entitled to ask the Government to address those issues.

The Government must recognise that Scottish local authorities need an annual settlement that is reasonably predictable and accept that local authorities have a job that they are elected to do and statutorily required to do and that no other organisation could do. There should not be constant attacks implying that local authorities are irresponsible but central Government are responsible. The opposite is also true. Democratically elected local authorities with clearly defined powers, financed by a properly accountable system, should be allowed to get on with the job. They should be allowed to budget properly, collect the tax because it is administratively simple to collect and deliver the services that people expect them to provide.

11.8 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): The House can be in no doubt about the importance of these issues to our constituents. In my constituency, poll tax payers will be expected to pay £584 next year, which, as has been pointed out, is a high amount. A substantial number of my constituents cannot afford to pay it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who knows that that figure was arrived at with great difficulty and was the result of hard decisions by the Labour Administration to hold the increase down. That is a measure of how unworkable the tax is.

We should not lose sight of some of the fundamental flaws of the tax. In Edinburgh, and no doubt in other large cities, hundreds, if not thousands, of people have disappeared from the electoral register and the poll tax register. The most fundamental case against the poll tax is that it is a disincentive to people to vote. No one approves of that, but surely we should judge our democracy by the degree of the participation of communities in the system. It is wholly unsatisfactory that we should have a system of local government taxation that has resulted in the disappearance of thousands of people from the electoral process.

Secondly, I repeat that we have seen a most massive transfer of the burden from the better-off areas of Edinburgh to the less well-off areas of the city. The same applies elsewhere. The amount of money being extracted from working people in my constituency is an absolute disgrace. At every constituency surgery, I come across the tragic cases of people who simply cannot afford to pay and, as a result, are in arrears and have actually had additional charges imposed on them. I am sure that many of my hon. Friends have had the same experience. The people to whom I refer are willing to pay, but they are simply unable to do so.

The third, and final, point that I want to make in relation to the poll tax is perhaps demonstrated more clearly in Lothian than anywhere else. It is that the system is totally unworkable. For the third year of the poll tax —1991-92—the Lothian regional council is budgeting for a 10 per cent. loss on yield. What a state of affairs that is. Whatever controversy surrounds the Lothian collection procedures, no one—certainly not any Minister—can reasonably say that Lothian regional council has not taken steps to secure the poll tax. In fact, the case of every person whose poll tax for 1989-90 is due is in the hands of the sheriff officers, and every effort is being made to collect the amounts due for 1990-91. Not £1 of debt has yet been written off. The reality is that the authorities there have had to face up to the fact that the tax is unworkable. They have had to budget for a 10 per cent. loss on yield. What sort of tax is this if only 90 per cent. of potential yield can be collected? And that takes no account of the people who have disappeared altogether and are not on the register.

Next year, the cost of collecting the tax will be £18·2 million, compared with the £7·4 million that it took to collect the rates in 1988-89—the last year of the rates. These figures are based on prices at September 1990. Surely, a tax that is unworkable, imposes a huge burden on our people and costs the Lothian regional council so much to collect is the ultimate folly.

11.13 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): It is appropriate, though tragic, that we should be debating this order on the eve of the day when we shall see figures that show a massive increase in unemployment throughout the United Kingdom—and Scotland will bear its full share of that massive increase. It is almost as though Ministers ignore the fact that flowing from that massive increase in unemployment is the responsibility on local authorities to care for the families who are the victims of Government economic policy which has resulted in breadwinners losing their jobs.

I regret to say—for I have never before seen it in politics —that the present Government's attitude is that they could not care less what happens to family life. The poll tax, the revenue support grant and the services that are provided by local authorities are all aspects of family life. If the

Government turn their back on what is happening to families—I am thinking of people's ability or inability to pay the poll tax, of the suffering that is caused by unemployment and of the effect of almost every other aspect of the Government's economic policy—they will sow the seeds of serious discontent.

As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said, the Government, and in particular the Minister who opened the debate, are generating a feeling that local government should be shunned or despised. The Minister's former colleague, Michael Ancram, even built a career on living off the back of local government. Since the Government came to office in 1979, the people of Scotland have every reason to be thankful to local government for the protection that councillors have provided the people whom they represent.

The Minister took pleasure in deriding local authorities in Scotland. However, he should think carefully about his constituents and the protection afforded to them by the councillors and the local authority in his constituency. They offer greater protection than does the Minister. The councillors offer protection that his constituents will welcome, cherish and appreciate because of the impact of the Government's policies on the people of Scotland.

I noticed that, when I rose to speak, the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), left the Chamber. I would not hold that against anyone and I do not blame him for doing that. However, it is noticeable that the Under-Secretary of State took every opportunity to criticise local authorities that increase their poll taxes. He did not take the opportunity tonight to praise Stirling district council for holding its poll tax level.

Local authorities cannot win even when they hold the poll tax at last year's level. The *Stirling Observer* is full of letters from supporters of the Minister of State criticising Labour councillors in Stirling for opportunism because they have held the poll tax at last year's level. If they had raised it, the paper would have been full of letters from the Minister of State's supporters criticising councillors for increasing the poll tax. Councillors in Scotland are doing an excellent job and they deserve the Government's support, not their criticism.

A new phenomenon is developing on the industrial scene in Scotland, involving large industrial conurbations comprising petrochemical industries that are highly capital-intensive, but low in terms of labour involvement. Indeed, BP has just announced that it is about to pay off another 100 people. The rate income to Central region, from those industries is high, but the job content is low. That has a social impact particularly on Central region and I hope that the Minister will consider the problem.

The Minister's main problem tonight is that he has been here before. He was a Minister, then he was a Back Bencher——

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): A never-ending story.

Mr. Ewing: The Minister is a retread. The Government seem to have more retreads than Kwik-fit.

The Minister has a past to live down. In this debate he has been unable to defend that past, and he has no future. In less than a year, we look forward to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and his colleagues occupying the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know whether you or your colleagues have any control over the annunciators, but it was rather surprising, while working in the Library about 10 minutes ago, to see that I was speaking in the Chamber. Is there some form of misrepresentation in this place? I had to rush in to find out what I was saying. Can that matter be reported to the authorities?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not feel too embarrassed about being in two places at once.

11.19 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross) *rose*——

Mr. Foulkes: If the hon. and learned Gentleman rushes out, he will see his name on the annunciator.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I hope that I do not see the name of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on the annunciator because I should not wish to be confused with him.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) made the important point that the Minister has a past to live down. It is important that the House should know that the hon. Member for Falkirk, East has no past to live down, nor has he a future. It is remarkable, as the hon. Member for Falkirk, East demonstrated, that there is great praise for central Government. All government is bad and should be small. The great benefit of Scotland and the reason why the Scots are so popular worldwide is that we are the only recognisable race on earth that has the benefit of not having a Government. That is why the Scottish assembly and all that nonsense shall never come to pass.

It is extraordinary that the proposed tax to be raised by local government, which Opposition Members so greatly praise, should rise by a third. I should have thought that it was a considerable criticism of their capability and their efforts that local authorities should be increasing taxes on pensioners, on the retired, on the sick, and on everybody else by one third. I do not know whether Opposition Members think that that is a good idea—they never stop whingeing about hardship. That tax is a formidable hardship for every person in Scotland, and let us not forget it. Who is praising those who are increasing the burden by a third? Opposition Members are praising them. There are those who say that local authorities are wonderful. Nevertheless, whatever services they give, local authorities are a burden on the back of every citizen. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] I notice that those who said "nonsense" have all been members of local authorities——

Mr. Graham: And proud of it.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: —and proud of it, and no doubt proud that they are increasing the burden on the backs of the citizens this year by a third.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that, for the past 10 or 11 years, the clawback from his Government has meant that Scotland has lost in excess of £10 billion of taxpayers' money which should have gone back to local authorities. It was our money. There is an element of dishonesty in the hon. and learned Gentleman's argument, because most of the funding comes from central Government. Local authorities—Tory, Labour or whatever—have a job to do

[Mr. Ron Brown]

as subcontractors to central Government, but they have to be paid. If they are not paid, who is at fault? It is central Government, his Government. It is not a question of the poll tax. He is being dishonest by trying to kid people that it has something to do with the poll tax. It is about reality. The hon. and learned Gentleman should face up to that.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Once or twice in my life, I have faced up to reality—[HON. MEMBERS: "When?"]—and I will do so now. When I was defending people against the death penalty perhaps I faced up to reality, so let it not be mocked.

Let us be clear about this. I do not know where the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) gets his fantasies from about what he cares to call "clawback". In Scotland, we enjoy 30 per cent. per head more of all services than anybody in the rest of the kingdom. If he is looking for clawback, that will be the first thing to be affected if there is a Scottish assembly, whatever form it may take. There will never be another Labour Government, but if the hon. Gentleman cares to fantasise, he will lose 30 per cent. of what is spent on everybody who lives in Scotland. That will make whatever he fantasises about clawback look like major destruction. So let us have no nonsense about that.

The Government have obtained for the people of Scotland a level of life——

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): Poverty, unemployment, bad housing.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: No. Who said poverty? Let us be clear: when the Government came to office, Scotland had the lowest industrial wage in Europe; now it has the highest. We have obtained a quality of life for the people of Scotland which is denied to the rest of the people of the United Kingdom. It is perhaps something about which we should keep quiet lest we lose it. If we had an assembly, we would lose it.

Let us understand that there is nothing good about government, central or local, spending the money of those from whom they have to obtain it. I do not take pride in the concept that the people of Scotland may have to pay a third more next year because the people who will benefit from that are not those who pay it but those who spend it. I regard that as a Caledonian shame.

11.29 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Time is short, but I shall try to respond courteously to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who asked a particular question. I can do no better than respond in a similar manner to that of his hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) who, the other day, when introducing his 10-minute Bill, said, as I would, that as soon as it is indelibly clear that the poll tax is abolished, he would pay all that he owed since that tax was introduced. That is as fair as we can put it.

The hon. Member for Garscadden knows, as does the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton)—representing the districts they do—that the majority of people who are not paying the poll tax, cannot pay it. It is not sufficient to ask people who are in such a desperate plight to wait until there is a Labour Government. We must analyse the cruelties of the tax by asking the Government whether they are going to persist with their view that the tax is collectable, when every authority gives signs that it is not.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Scotland paraded the support grant order as though it were Government money that was being dispensed. We know well, as it has often been repeated to us, that Governments do not have any money— merely taxpayers' money in one form or another, that is redistributed. A balance has to be struck, and we are discussing the centralising forces of Government, depicted by the revenue support grant, versus local autonomy.

If we have any doubt about the nature of services asked for by central Government and called into being by the House, we should refer to appendix B of the report, which states:

"The following table shows the breakdown of current expenditure for 1991-92 as proposed by the Secretary of State".

The total valuation in terms of grant-aided expenditure is about £4·79 billion, which is what the Secretary of State decrees should be provided locally. Those are services that we in the House demand, and we ask that they be provided locally.

One service that I call, in shorthand, education, although its correct title is education, libraries and museums, receives £2·5 billion. We have the audacity to say that local authorities are profligate, when we know full well that they have to provide such services. We are discussing how to finance them.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary spoke of the three elements of finance: the revenue support grant, the non-domestic rates and the specific grant. The balance is provided by the poll tax. How can it be right to gather tax from virtually all the population on the basis of taxes that are related to income and ability to pay, but when it comes to squeezing local authorities and trying to make them an example, the tax is totally unrelated to ability to pay?

According to the COSLA figures, 80 per cent. of expenditure by local authorities is determined by and comes from central Government. Local authorities are responsible for only 20 per cent., which now has to be collected by the most draconian measures, and the Government choose to ignore that percentage. They do so at their peril.

The law is being brought into disrepute. Civil liberties are being threatened. Labour Front-Bench Members paraded with me behind banners which declared, "No warrant sales". No doubt they will do so again in a month's time while simultaneously, to avoid breaching the Data Protection Act 1984, going through the list of local authority employees at great cost to embarrass those employees. Some of them may be making a political protest, but others may be lowly paid and cannot pay. I believe Jean McFadden, the leader of COSLA and an honoured member of Glasgow district council, who says that local government finance is in a state of crisis. The Government should make it plain that they will abolish the poll tax.

Yesterday we met the two Secretaries of State. There may well be deficiencies in our proposals for a local income tax, but they do not involve a tax which is unrelated to the ability to pay; they relate strictly to the ability to pay. We may disagree about the particular poundage, but what is not in dispute is that the poll tax is wholly unrelated to the

ability to pay and should be opposed and brought to an end as soon as possible, in the interests of social cohesion and justice.

11.36 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart: We have had a wide-ranging debate and several detailed points have been raised, particularly by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). I shall try to deal with them, but if I cannot, perhaps we can meet or exchange correspondence about them.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) made some personal remarks about me. I speak as someone who has been a local government councillor.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Down here.

Mr. Stewart: Indeed, in London.

Mr. Ewing: In Westminster.

Mr. Stewart: Not in Westminster.

I am happy to take the opportunity to pay tribute to Eastwood district council, which serves the people extremely well, and to the Labour district councillors and the regional councillor who represent the Barrhead and Neilston wards in my constituency. I may disagree with their policies, but they try to do their best for the communities which they represent.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) referred to the crucial point about the total level of public expenditure by local authorities. A fact which is not in dispute is that Scottish local authorities spend 30 per cent. more per adult than do local authorities in England or Wales. That figure needs more explanation than it has ever had. There is no obvious explanation for such a major disparity.

Both the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and my hon. and learned Friend referred to the level of Government support to local government north and south of the border. In 1990-91, aggregate external finance in England represents 64·5 per cent. of the total. This year, the community charge payer in England pays 35·5 per cent. The comparable figures for Scotland—they may be of interest to some of my colleagues from south of the border who are listening to this debate—are that the aggregate external finance, the Government's contribution——

Mr. Douglas: Not the Government's.

Mr. Stewart: I stand corrected. I should have referred to the taxpayers' contribution——

Mr. Wray *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman is a constituent of mine, but in view of the time I cannot give way to him.

Mr. Wray *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: In case the hon. Gentleman threatens not to vote for me, I shall give way to him.

Mr. Wray: The Minister has mentioned many facts and figures, but he did not mention the magnitude of the uncollected poll tax. Does he realise that he has left untold the 14·9 per cent. uncollected poll tax in 1989-90 in Scotland, 17·4 per cent. of which was in Strathclyde region? That meant a shortfall of £47 million. The latest figures provided by the statistical authorities in the House show that in late December 59·2 per cent. of the poll tax had not been collected. Some 63 per cent. of that was in Strathclyde. That makes a total of £623 million, with £289 still uncollected. How many warrant sales will that mean in Strathclyde?

Mr. Stewart: I am not sure that I shall always give way to my constituent, but I am happy to deal with his point about non-payment. The point was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North and by other hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Hon. Members should look at the precise figures. If it is so difficult to collect the poll tax, why has Borders collected 99 per cent. of its budgeted income for 1989, and is still receiving payments? It expects to collect in excess of its budgeted income this year. That shows that the system is adequate. It is an important fact that community charge income makes up only a little more than 20 per cent. of Scottish local authorities' total income.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) made a number of points, but he failed to recall his forecast of what would happen this year. I shall remind him of that. He asked my right hon. and learned Friend whether he accepted

"that on a standstill budget with no expansion of service, the average payment is likely to rise by about £30 a year?"—[*Official Report*, 25 July 1990; Vol. 177, c. 490.]

If the hon. Gentleman's forecast had been proved correct, community charge payers in Scotland would be a great deal better off and much happier.

The hon. Gentleman referred to balances. The authorities have run down their balances in this financial year——

Mr. Harry Ewing: Which year?

Mr. Stewart: The current financial year, 1990-91, not the year to which the debate refers. Their reason for doing so is not unconnected with the fact that that was the year of the regional elections. First, the authorities have increased expenditure; secondly, they have run down their balances; and, thirdly, they have piled two years of non-payment on to the community charge payer for the next financial year. That is undoubtedly an exercise in political cynicism.

We have heard a lot from hon. Members about local authorities cutting their expenditure. We heard that particularly from the hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) in relation to Lothian. But, as I understand it, Lothian is proposing to increase its expenditure by some 11·4 per cent. It has cut planned increases in expenditure, but that is not a cut in expenditure.

This is a perfectly fair settlement, and I commend it to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 193.

Division No. 65] **[11.45 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aitken, Jonathan	Arnold, Sir Thomas
Alexander, Richard	Ashby, David
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Aspinwall, Jack
Allason, Rupert	Atkins, Robert
Amess, David	Atkinson, David
Arbuthnot, James	Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*

Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry

Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991, dated 28th January 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

Water Metering (Isle of Wight)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

11.57 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for granting me this debate on water metering. The Isle of Wight faces many challenges in a changing world. We have a corrugated, stainless steel-clad low energy hospital that has not yet opened, a highly controversial, waste-derived fuel plant, which looks as though it will be joined by an equally controversial pellet and coal-fired mini power station, and to date 48,000 domestic water meters.

I had the first Adjournment debate on water metering on 14 June 1989, and tonight is the culmination of our experience thus far, although the trial is to continue until 1993. The purpose of the debate is, I hope, to have some effect on national decisions on water metering, using the benefits of experience on the Isle of Wight, as well as encouraging Ministers to follow up and tidy up a few loose ends.

Mr. Ian Byatt, Director General of the Office of Water Services, visited the island in December last year, and the opportunity for the public and interested bodies to put their views to him on paying for water ends on 31 March this year. Mr. Byatt held his first public meeting on water charging on the island at Sandown, and I must put on record my personal thanks for his courtesy, kindness and refreshingly open approach to both myself and my constituents.

I hope to tackle in this debate first the national and then the local issues. Our experiences tell us that a higher standing charge, with a fixed block tariff, would be preferable to the very low standing charge and the rising block tariff that we have. That is because the Isle of Wight is a holiday destination with a massive seasonal fluctuation and a high proportion of second homes. The consumers involved are not paying an effective price for the infrastructure costs of water supply and sewage disposal, while those of us who are resident all the year round are effectively subsidising the absentee property owners. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give me an assurance that the position will be adjusted as soon as comparative data on the existing tariff structure have served their purpose, remembering that the trial continues until 1993.

The Council for the Protection of Rural England has said that water meters are the right answer to the environmental problems created by ever-increasing consumption of water nationally. The Isle of Wight escaped a hosepipe ban last summer, although we have to import large quantities of water to meet the peak demand in summer.

In my original Adjournment debate, I mentioned that the Liberal Democrats had called for the island to be metered, but had attempted to distance themselves from that position once the project was under way. It is a sad commentary on their political creed that a minority of their number have since sought to create fear and panic in the local population by suggesting that water metering has led to a rise in the number of cases of gastro-enteritis—a claim immediately dismissed as irresponsible and ill founded by the island's public health consultant, a doctor. We have only to think of Italy, Spain and France, which have exceptionally hot summers and water meters, to realise how idiotic such claims are.

The waste water charges have led to some concern, particularly among keen gardeners who resent being charged for a percentage of the water consumed on the basis of its being returned to the sewer: in their case, it usually goes on their begonias. The position is difficult to explain logically; some thought will have to be given simplifying that aspect of metering nationally.

I appreciate, however, that in many areas the company supplying the water is not the one responsible for disposing of the sewage. The current freeze-up has highlighted the need yet again to reassure metered property owners that their bills will be adjusted to take account of leaks that are reported and repaired within a reasonable period. Lest anyone should suggest that the cost of water lost through frozen pipes should not be shared by the water company, let me point out that the water companies themselves have wasted many thousands of gallons through burst water mains during the severe weather, through no fault of their own.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), wrote to me on 13 November following my meeting with my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who was then Prime Minister. I was concerned at the size of bills facing large familes with young children, and constituents with severe medical problems. I urged my right hon. Friend to consider a survey of all the meter trial areas to analyse the problem.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary wrote to me as follows:

> "I agree that some further investigation is necessary and we are proposing to carry out a small study of all the trial areas to see if a problem exists. As a first step, the water companies involved in the trials will be asked to identify from their records those customers where the change to metering has resulted in substantial additional cost. Linking this information to data obtained during meter installation surveys about the type of property and the number of occupants should provide a basis for deciding if there are grounds for conducting a small social survey along the lines you suggest.
>
> As you know, Ian Byatt has published a consultation paper on methods of charging for water. That exercise will also provide an opportunity to throw further light on this particular subject and we shall look to see what is said about it in the responses to the consultation paper."

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Is my hon. Friend aware that water metering trials were carried out in Welywn Hatfield in the Brookmans Park area and that, after tremendous representation to me, the local media, the Government and the local water authority, the meters —over 500—were found to be faulty? The huge bills, such as those my hon. Friend has mentioned in the Isle of Wight, were found to be far too high. The meters did not work and the whole scheme has been abandoned, much to the delight of the people of Brookmans Park. We are now waiting for the local water authority and the Government to come up with a much more satisfactory scheme that will not cause inconvenience to my constituents. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight that it is a ludicrous and unnecessary factor of our life today to introduce water meters that do not work and are against the public interest.

Mr. Field: From his experience of just 500 meters, my hon. Friend might consider how busy I have been with 48,000 of them.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will agree that it should not be necessary for me to keep troubling the Prime Minister about this. Since my hon. Friend the Member for Wells wrote to me, I have been to see the chairman of the Social Security Advisory Committee, who has drawn attention to the need for some additional adjustment to social security benefits to assist low-income families with their bills. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will tell me where his officials have got to with the study. I urge him to consider recommending a local adjustment to the housing benefit structure to meet the problem if the study shows that it is warranted.

There appears to be an on-going concern with the non-domestic metering of church property and village halls. Such properties used to receive water at a reduced rate, and the transfer to the full non-domestic tariff has been quite a problem for their already stretched finances. That needs serious consideration. I have been unable to obtain any conclusive help from Ministers or the water companies on this point. For my constituents and the various church authorities, it is still very much a live issue.

I should like to use this Adjournment debate to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to an anomaly in the law. There is no ability to reduce or waive the infrastructure charges. That is particularly unhelpful for first-time sewage schemes. There is no method available to require households to connect to new sewage schemes, yet those who do not are often the first people to complain about pollution of streams and rivers. That anomaly must be addressed, and I believe that I have the support of the National Rivers Authority in saying that. I make that point in the hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will take it up and ensure that his Department addresses it in due course when it is considering environmental legislation.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of one domestic property that has since decided to disconnect from the first-time sewage scheme in order to save the charges. That is irresponsible. The ability not to connect, or even to disconnect, runs contrary to the excellent environmental programme in which the Government are engaged to clean up our beaches and estuaries. It is quite wrong that this should still be a voluntary matter, especially when the borough and district councils and the water company have invested so much in new sewage schemes.

Last week, Southern Water announced that it would not fit any more meters on the island, and that it is drawing the line at 48,000 out of a total of 53,000 homes. At the beginning of the trial, I had an avalanche of correspondence from constituents who did not want their property to be metered. Now I regularly receive letters urging me to obtain meters for my constituents.

I have two secretaries on the island, one with a metered property and the other with an unmetered property. The latter pays £125 a year for her water, based on a rateable value of £180. The former pays £108 for her metered water supply and her house had a rateable value of £240. Those figures show why an increasing number of my constituents want to know why they cannot have meters fitted.

I urge my hon. Friend to find a modest sum to enable the water company to offer meters to customers, allowing an element of customer choice to the remaining 5,000 dwellings. I appreciate that these dwellings are largely the uneconomic properties and that it is uneconomical to meter subdivided flats in large buildings, but I hope that the Minister will agree that 5,000 homes are too many to be left unmetered. I realise that it would never be possible to cover 100 per cent. of the properties on the island, but given our strong island community spirit—we are all in the same boat—the number not yet fitted with meters should be significantly reduced. I believe that we need another 1,000 to 1,500 meters.

My only other plea tonight is that the review of the community charge and the abolition of rateable values should not impede the installation of water meters in the parts of the United Kingdom where water is often in short supply. This method of charging for water puts a precious resource in its proper perspective, and we must make progress with it for the sake of future generations of people and wildlife. I hope to hear that my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside will shortly accede to my request to visit the island to see the scheme for himself.

12.13 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on securing time for a further debate about water metering trials, which are being conducted throughout the whole of his constituency. He has made a number of points with care, and I shall do my best to respond to them in detail. If time prevents me from dealing with all of them, I shall write to him with more details.

This trial, the largest of the 12 metering trials taking place around the country, has been the focus of much attention both within and outside the water industry. My hon. Friend has spared no effort in pursuing a number of important issues that have arisen as a result of the trial with Ministers, senior officials and Southern Water, and he has been steadfast in the pursuit of his constituents' best interests.

As the House will be aware, the water industry has used rateable values as the basis of charging for its services for many years. That basis provides only a rough and ready link with consumption and, like the old system of domestic general rates, it has resulted in anomalies and unfairness, particularly for pensioners and other small households living in houses and flats with high rateable values.

With the abolition of domestic rates last year and the ban on the use of rateable values as a basis of charging for water and sewerage from the year 2000, there is a need for the water industry to move towards new methods of charging for its services. Metering, a flat rate charge per property and banding of property with a flat rate charge for each band are the main options being considered. The House will be aware that the debate on various charging options is being carried forward in a consultation paper that the Director General of Water Services issued last year.

Each water company must make its own choice of future charging method in the light of all the circumstances in its operating area. Although, with normal rainfall, we are not yet near the limit of supplies, even in dry areas, it is an obvious fact that the supply of water is finite. One of

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

the most effective ways of reinforcing the prudent use of water, by discouraging indiscriminate use and waste, is to relate charges to the amount of water used.

I believe that metering is potentially the fairest option, as it extends the normal principle that customers pay for what they use. It is, of course, the method used in relation to other utilities, such as gas and electricity. My hon. Friend will be aware that a recent survey by the Consumers Association of its members on the Isle of Wight confirms my belief; 66 per cent. or so of those responding expressed a preference for water charges on the basis of a metered supply. My hon. Friend made it clear that some of those on the island who are still unmetered see the benefit of having meters fixed.

The number of domestic properties that have a metered water supply is growing all the time. In addition to the 61,000 properties in the metering trials, many households have opted to have a meter installed on a voluntary basis, and many water companies now require new properties to be fitted with a meter as a condition of connecting a water supply.

The metering trials were set up in 1988 to provide information on the costs and problems of implementing a general system of metering and to determine the impact of charging by volume on consumption. The main aim of the Isle of Wight trial is to establish the practicality and costs of metering on a large scale. It is also designed to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of internal and external metering. It is the only large-scale trial in the programme, involving around 52,000 properties. The installation phase is almost complete, and about 94 per cent. of the properties on the island have been metered.

It is, of course, inevitable that a fundamental change in the basis of charging for water, from rateable values to charges based on the volume of water used, means a shift in the incidence of payment between households. My hon. Friend will be aware that, in the small-scale trials, about two thirds of customers on average are paying the same as, or less than, they would under the rateable value system of charging. Similar information is not yet available from the Isle of Wight because not all customers have been charged on the basis of metered use for a full year, and those that have may not be a representative sample.

Nevertheless, an analysis of some 7,750 annual metered charges for 1989-90 on the island has shown that only about 10 per cent. are paying £50 or more per year more than they would have done under the rateable value basis of charging. This compares with about 11 per cent. of customers in the small scale trial areas. I accept that the Isle of Wight sample may not be representative of the whole, but at this stage I have no reason to believe that, in general, the effect of metering on the Isle of Wight is any different from that in the other trial areas.

My hon. Friend is aware that the charges scheme for the Isle of Wight provided a number of safeguards designed to protect the interests of customers. These included a limit on the amount by which charges can be increased, and provision for the tariff to be reduced if income from the trial exceeds what would have been received from charges based on rateable values for the island as a whole, provided that the increased income did not arise from increased consumption caused by abnormally dry weather conditions.

I know that the question of income from the trial has raised particular concern. Monitoring this safeguard poses some difficulty, because not all properties were metered during the first year of the trial, and during this period customers would have been billed variously on rateable value, on part rateable value and part metered consumption, or wholly on metered consumption. This has made it difficult for a proper comparison to be made. In addition, certain information about a water company's operations is commercially sensitive, and it would be improper to make it public.

However, my hon. Friend will be aware that, in order to achieve the same level of income as would have been received under the rateable value charging basis, the trial tariff was determined on the basis of the average consumption per household on the island. He will also be aware that the average consumption is running well below the level assumed when the original tariff was agreed. There is no reason, therefore, to doubt the assurance that my Department has received from Southern Water that its income has not exceeded the level that would have been recovered from rateable value-based charges.

I am aware of speculation that Southern Water might increase the charges to compensate for any loss of income. There is no provision in the charges scheme for an increase in the tariff on that account. A proposal to do so would require an amendment to the charges scheme, which can be made only with the approval of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, following consultation with all customers. I understand that the proposed increase in the trial tariff for 1991-92 falls within the limits on increases provided for in the present charges scheme, and that Southern Water is not proposing to seek approval for a further increase.

My hon. Friend has expressed concern over the effect of the rising block tariff on those people who have a need to use large amounts of water. I should explain to the House that the particular tariff used in the Isle of Wight trial is designed to encourage the use of water for essential purposes but, at the same time, to limit non-essential usage. All customers pay a standing charge. The first 90 cu m of water used each year is charged at a preferential rate, and all usage in excess of this amount is charged at a higher rate.

The amount of water charged at the preferential rate was calculated to cover the essential water requirements for a household of three people. This was to the benefit of most customers, since the average household size on the island is less than three people. I accept, however, that this tariff places a relatively higher burden on large families and those who have a need to use larger amounts of water than normal because of a disability or medical condition.

Concerns about the rising block tariff were raised at the public meeting that my hon. Friend arranged in conjunction with Southern Water last December. I understand that Southern Water has taken note of what was said at that meeting and is prepared to adjust the tariff so that the allowable increase in charges for 1991-92 will not bear so heavily on large users. It is proposing to increase only the standing charge and the preferential rate, leaving the higher rate at its present level.

The effect of this is that, at the average level of consumption on the island, the overall increase in water and sewerage charges will be 14·7 per cent.—which is in line with the average increase in regional charges generally. The increase for larger users will be less. For example, at

200 cu m, the increase will be only 10·4 per cent. It is inevitable, of course, that low users will pay proportionately more. Households using 80 cu m, for example, will face an increase of 16·7 per cent. But even at this level, the increase works out, on average, at less than 5p per day, and, in general, it is the smaller households that have gained most benefit from the change to metered charging.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome this move towards reducing the differential between the preferential and higher-rate charges. I appreciate, however, that it does not fully allay his concern about the level of charges faced by large low-income families and those people who have a need to use larger than normal amounts of water because of a disability or medical conditon. He is aware that my Department has collected information from the trial areas about the number of households facing substantial increases in bills as a result of metering together with information on the number of people in those households, and whether they are in arrears with payment, in an effort to gauge the possible extent of the problem and to see whether a small social survey was justified.

I have to say that there have been considerable difficulties in making any meaningful assessment of the information from the Isle of Wight trial. That is mainly due to the fact that few customers provided Southern Water with information on the size of household when the properties were surveyed prior to installation of meters. However, based on such information as is available from a relatively small sample, it has been estimated that about 1·5 per cent. of households on the island consist of families with three or more children who are paying £50 or more than they would have done under the old system of charges based on rateable value. It has, however, not been possible to put a reliable figure on the number of households in arrears with payment.

My hon. Friend referred to a commitment given by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), when he was Under-Secretary for the Environment, to pursue the question of including increases in water charges in the uprating of income support. I can assure him that this matter has been discussed extensively between my Department and the Department of Social Security. I am aware that the Social Security Advisory Committee has recommended an increase in income support rates by an amount greater than would otherwise be the case in recognition of the fact that water charges are increasing faster than the rate of inflation. I am sympathetic to that recommendation, and we are pursuing it with the Department of Social Security. However, my hon. Friend will of course appreciate that that is one of many demands on public expenditure and will have to be considered alongside those demands.

My hon. Friend raised a number of other points about which I promise to write to him in detail. Those points ranged from the position concerning church halls to hygiene. However, I hope that he will have been reassured by my comments, by the fact that we continue to give attention to his concerns and that my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside has accepted an invitation to visit the island on 30 April.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing the metering trials once more to the attention of the House. As he has said, they will continue well into 1993. A great deal of information has already been collected and published about the cost and problems of installing meters. We are anxious as far as possible to resolve any outstanding difficulties that may still remain.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 February 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MIDLAND METRO BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 21 February at Seven o'clock.

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Monday 18 February at Seven o'clock.

AIRE AND CALDER NAVIGATION BILL *(By Order)*
Read a Second time, and committed.

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

HOOK ISLAND (POOLE BAY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL *(By Order)*

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

MIDLAND METRO (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 21 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tourism

1. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tourists visited Northern Ireland from the Republic in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): An estimated 364,000.

Mr. Paice: I thank my hon. Friend for giving me those figures. Does he agree that there are considerable opportunities for job creation in the tourism industry in Northern Ireland? What efforts is he making to promote Northern Ireland by portraying the proper image of much of it—that of a place with tremendously beautiful scenery and vistas which can attract tourists and make for an enjoyable holiday for all?

Mr. Needham: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments about the beauty of our Province. We intend to increase our expenditure on attracting people from the Republic to the north. About twice as many people from the north go to the south. A recent survey showed that some 73 per cent. of the people of the south had not been to the north, and some 72 per cent. said that they had no intention of visiting it. However, of the 27 per cent. who had been there, some 98 per cent. said that they had thoroughly enjoyed it and would like to come back. Our message to the people of the south is therefore, "Come north and enjoy yourselves."

Mr. John D. Taylor: Now that the Dublin Government have complied with the European Community's request for the removal of restrictions on the movement of visitors from the Republic into Northern Ireland, what positive steps to promote tourism have the Government taken in respect of Dublin and the Republic?

When the Minister next meets Ministers from the Republic, will he request that the Southern Irish tourist board, in its offices abroad, carry tourist literature from Northern Ireland and recommend those who come to the Republic to visit Northern Ireland as well?

Mr. Needham: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. We are spending some £800,000 jointly with Bond Failte and we have together arranged a programme of marketing to attract more people from abroad to go north when they visit the island of Ireland. As the right hon. Gentleman probably knows, some 60,000 visitors to Northern Ireland go to the Republic first.

We have extended and improved our office facilities in the south and we believe that this year particularly, when many people may not be thinking of travelling abroad, there will be opportunities for us to cash in not only on people from the south but on people from Great Britain. We believe that we now have the facilities and the product —and we know that we have the people and the countryside—to make a success of it.

Rev. Ian Paisley: How do the figures that the Minister has given compare with those for the past five years? Is the money that he is spending really producing the goods?

Mr. Needham: We have not yet started to spend the money in any great quantity. The number of visitors to Northern Ireland is increasing, from some 900,000 in 1988-89 to, we hope, some 1·6 million by 1994. The 1990 figures will show an overall increase of some 6 per cent., but a 20 to 25 per cent. increase in the number of people coming purely for holiday purposes. The total number is up to some 1·3 million.

Those are not very substantial figures, but if we improve our ability to attract visitors, we could create some 20,000 or 30,000 new jobs in the north over a period of years. None of that is helped by the image created by violence or, occasionally, by those who report on that image in a way that is not entirely balanced.

Mr. Mallon: In anticipation of an influx of visitors, especially from the Republic of Ireland, can the Minister suggest which roads they should use so that tourists, who are very sensitive to terrorism, will not be immediately faced by lookout posts and checkpoints of an inordinate nature? If tourists come to a checkpoint and find the road closed, does the Minister envisage that they will continue their journey into Northern Ireland by using other roads or that they will return to the Republic of Ireland?

Mr. Needham: As the hon. Gentleman knows all too well, the reason for the checkpoints is the continuing level of paramilitary violence. If tourists have to go through hideous-looking checkpoints, I accept that it does nothing for our image or our ability to attract people to Northern Ireland. We are considering what can be done to make checkpoints easier on and more pleasant to the eye. Nevertheless, the security of people travelling from one side of the border to another is paramount.

Trust Ports

2. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to privatise Belfast and other trust ports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I intend bringing forward a draft Order in Council that will have regard to the provisions of the Ports Bill. This will provide the necessary powers to enable any of Northern Ireland's trust ports—Belfast, Coleraine, Londonderry and Warrenpoint—to come forward with privatisation schemes.

Mr. Janman: I am very pleased with my hon. Friend's answer and I congratulate him on his clear commitment to allow those ports to go into the private sector. May I suggest, however, that both he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have discussions with our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on whether privatisation of those trust ports can be included in the Ports Bill. That would send a clear signal to the IRA, Sinn Fein and others that Ulster is part of the United Kingdom and that there is no need for separate legislation for Ulster. When Ulster is affected by legislation, it should be debated fully on the Floor of the House, as debate of the Ports Bill on Report would allow it to be.

Mr. Needham: Of course Ulster is part of the United Kingdom and will remain so as long as the majority so wish. However, this is a transferred matter and the view of many is that such matters should, if it is possible at some time, be capable of being decided by the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland. I repeat however, that we intend to introduce an Order in Council early in 1992 and to have it on the statute book by the end of that year. Then we shall consider what ports can be privatised. In the meantime, a substantial investment programme in those ports is taking place and I am delighted to say that most of them are expanding rapidly.

Mr. Beggs: I have much sympathy with the observations of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman). I regret that the Minister has announced today that this is to be done by means of another Order in Council. Does the Minister agree that the unparalleled record of growth and development of Larne harbour and the excellent working relationships there suggest clearly the opportunities that will arise for Belfast port and the other trust ports after privatisation?

Mr. Needham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. A large percentage of Larne's business comes from the south. The amount of business at Warrenpoint has doubled in the past five years and business has increased by 40 per cent. at Belfast. Larne is an example to any port of how to be efficient, productive, competitive and successful.

Mr. Barry Field: Will my hon. Friend go a little further and give an undertaking that when the Order in Council is introduced it will allow management and employees to opt for a management-employee buy-out?

Mr. Needham: We shall consider that question most carefully. We are already following what my hon. Friend and his colleagues are suggesting here.

Mr. Stott: It is clear from the questions to the Minister that there is a great deal of interest in the proposal. The Ports Bill is in Standing Committee, where Members of Parliament can table amendments, scrutinise the Bill and interrogate Ministers. How do the Government propose to allow Members of Parliament from the Province and others to give equal consideration to these very important Government proposals? Does he not think that it is unacceptable to privatise a major sector of Northern Ireland's economy by means an Order in Council, which allows debate for only an hour?

Mr. Needham: I repeat that it is a transferred matter. The Government are constantly looking for ways to create systems that have the agreement of the whole House on how Northern Ireland affairs can be conducted. The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) never misses an opportunity to criticise, but he has not yet put forward a proposal that is acceptable to the majority of hon. Members.

Terrorism

3. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he proposes to introduce to compensate those persons who have suffered damage or loss, either in their businesses or occupations, as a result of security measures taken against terrorism.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): There is provision under section 28 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 for the payment of compensation where, under the Act,

"any real or personal property is taken, occupied, destroyed or damaged, or any other act is done interfering with private rights of property".

Mr. McGrady: I thank the Minister for his answer, but surely he can inform the House more adequately that there is no provision for compensation for people who suffer loss of business, loss of jobs or loss of homes because of legitimate and proper security measures. The only way to get compensation is to suffer direct damage as a result of explosion or other terrorist activity. Surely the people who are in the front line and subject to economic and social deprivation because of the necessary buildings and fortifications which destroy businesses are entitled to be compensated for their losses on behalf of the community.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out that the problem is one of security and caused by the activity of paramilitaries who engage in terrorist activity at the expense of the whole community. The community pays a price for that. I accept that there is genuine hardship in some cases. Ex gratia payments are available to some people in Northern Ireland, depending on the circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman has a particular case in mind he might contemplate some of those activities.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Is the Minister aware that there are four men in Maghaberry prison who lost their jobs because of terrorism? They also require compensation. Will he compensate those men—known as the Armagh Four—with a retrial?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. He also knows that these are matters which are presently under review.

Mr. Molyneaux: Does the Minister agree that every citizen in Northern Ireland has, directly or indirectly, suffered loss and damage at the hands of terrorists? Does he accept, or is he aware of, the perception that there are occasions when the terrorist is compensated rather more generously than the victim? Does he agree that all hon. Members and those of us who serve on councils have a duty to support the forces of the Crown in eradicating terrorism from whatever quarter it comes?

Dr. Mawhinney: I agree wholeheartedly with the first and last points made by the right hon. Gentleman. As for the second point, I should be sad if such a perception existed. The right hon. Gentleman knows that anyone who claims compensation in Northern Ireland is treated under the law without any particular favour, and certainly with no particular bias towards those who may in some way have been involved in terrorist activity.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best measures against terrorism would be the introduction of video cameras during interrogation? That would increase the chances of conviction because it would be more difficult for the suspects to withdraw the confessions that they had made before the camera. As that measure has been recommended by Lord Colville, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a satisfactory measure to take now?

Dr. Mawhinney: The matter referred to by my hon. Friend was a matter of considerable debate when Standing Committee B was considering the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill. My hon. Friend may find the arguments deployed in that debate of some interest.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Will the Minister remind his hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) that that hon. Gentleman was himself a member of that Committee and actually voted against the proposal to introduce video recordings in such cases?

Does the Minister accept that he told the Committee that schemes existed for making ex gratia payments in such areas? Does he further accept that that is an unsatisfactory state of affairs and that what we really require is a statutory scheme so that every claim can be treated on its merits and every settlement can be seen to be fair?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman will remember that we debated the matter at some length in Committee. He advanced certain arguments, and so did I. I made it clear that the Government, with some reluctance, had reached the view that it was not possible to take the steps urged on us in Committee. I remind the hon. Gentleman that I also said that I would reflect on what had been said in Committee—without any commitment—and that we would consider the arguments that had been deployed. I am happy to reaffirm that, without any commitment, we will certainly reflect further on those arguments.

School Sport

4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on sport in schools in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Physical education, which embraces sports activities and games, presently forms a common but voluntary element of the primary and secondary curricula in Northern Ireland. From next September, physical education is to become a compulsory part of the Northern Ireland curriculum. My right hon. and noble Friend the Paymaster General is currently considering advice from the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council on the content of the programme of study for this subject.

Mr. Greenway: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the fact that physical education and games are to become a compulsory part of the curriculum. Can he assure us that such activities will be suitably geared to the ability of each individual boy and girl, and can he say how well Northern Ireland schools are doing in out-of-school games and physical education on Saturdays and in the evenings?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments and for the constructive interest that he takes in these matters. Physical education is obviously geared to the abilities of the individual child. My hon. Friend asked about games out of school hours. He will know that Northern Ireland schools have a proud record of sporting activity and achievement. Although I do not have the figures to prove it, I would guess that, given the size of the population in Northern Ireland, we probably produce greater sporting excellence than any other part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trimble: May I direct the Minister's attention to another aspect of training and education and ask him to

consult the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to see what steps can be taken to retrain the 140 workers at C. S. Brooks—a factory in my constituency——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about sport.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have heard what the hon. Gentleman said, as has my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, but the question is about sport in schools.

Constitution

6. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations with the political parties on the constitutional future of Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): I continue to seek agreement on a basis for formal talks which could lead to a comprehensive political accommodation satisfactory to all relevant interests and addressing all relevant aspects of the matter. I regret that it has not yet proved possible to bridge the gaps between the various parties' positions. I remain convinced of the powerful case for transferring political power, authority and responsibility to locally elected representatives in Northern Ireland, provided this can be done on a basis enjoying widespread support.

Mr. Stanbrook: Will my right hon. Friend give up his honest and brave attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable and will he eschew all new political initiatives involving the so-called Irish dimension and concentrate instead, with the political parties in Northern Ireland, on providing a decent system of local government and firm and fair central Government and, to coin a phrase, on "extirpating the IRA"?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the tone of his question. But I am determined to pursue the process on which we are engaged until it is absolutely clear that the positions of the various parties are incompatible. On the latter part of my hon. Friend's question, I will consider any workable proposals for changes in the role of local government in Northern Ireland if they seem likely to command widespread acceptance.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Can the Secretary of State say what are the inherent defects of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental process which inhibit Ministers from responding positively to British suggestions and recognising Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom? A week ago today the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition united in opposing terrorism and seeking to maintain democracy. Does the Secretary of State recognise that that would demand retrospective restoration of democracy to Northern Ireland? Will he take steps speedily to restore it?

Mr. Brooke: If the hon. Gentleman had listened closely to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook), he would have heard me say how anxious I was to effect the transfer for which the hon. Gentleman asks. In terms of the context of the hon. Gentleman's question, political parties from both sides of the community want any talks to cover matters which must necessarily involve the Irish Government.

Mr. Kilfedder: Will the Secretary of State comment on the recent Dublin proposals? Does he agree that whether or not the talks fail, a considerable amount of goodwill has been generated by them and that it would surely be a tragedy if efforts were not made to build on that goodwill at either an official or an unofficial level?

Mr. Brooke: I have received some further proposals from the Irish Government. I believe that they have merit and will keep us in play, but I do not know whether they offer us the opportunity of reaching our goal. They are further evidence of the Irish Government's desire to contribute to bridging the gap. I concur with what the hon. Gentleman has said about the goodwill that has been engendered by this process, but, as we come to what I think will be the conclusion of this part of the process, I think that it will be necessary in the closing stages for there to be considerable political will to make sure that we bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

Mr. Mallon: Will the Secretary of State confirm that in the summer of last year the Social Democratic and Labour party presented to him a written position which opened the way for full talks and negotiations? Will he further confirm that last week the Irish Government presented a written position paper to him which held out the prospect of moving forward to those real negotiations? Does he expect at any stage a written position from the Unionist party which might hold out some hope of moving towards the type of negotiations that we want?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is correct in what he says about both his party and the Irish Government, but he will be aware from the conversations in which we have been engaged mutually that there have been sticking points in all parties' proposals about how we proceed. We have sought to accommodate those in the decision that we reach. In response to the hon. Gentleman's question about the Unionists, he will recall his reluctance to engage in direct conversations and negotiations until we had reached an accommodation as to the basis of such talks. Therefore, he must find a way of putting that question to them by some other means.

Mr. Amery: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the House has been patient with him over the negotiations? We were led to believe that we would be given some statement by Christmas, yet we are now deep into February. That is frustrating. If the Secretary of State cannot make a statement yet, will he discuss with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House whether we could have a debate in which we can discuss all the matters raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook)?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful for the patience of both my right hon. Friend and the House. The only time when we had hoped that I could make a statement was at the time of the renewal of powers debate last year. I understand the anxiety of the House to see progress in these matters. I believe that they are coming to a conclusion. I hope that in the aftermath of that, it will be possible for us to debate them.

Mr. Hume: Let me put the Secretary of State right on his recent mistaken remark. The position of the SDLP, long before the right hon. Gentleman became Secretary of State and since he has held that office, is that my party will

sit down tomorrow with the Unionist parties to discuss any subject under the sun without any precondition. The Unionist parties chose to follow a process whereby they will talk to us only through the Secretary of State. Throughout that process I have seen written positions from the right hon. Gentleman and the Irish Government, and I have put the written position from my party. However, I have never seen a written position from either of the Unionist parties.

Mr. Brooke: I do not want to get into an altercation with the hon. Gentleman about this. He is slightly misremembering the process in which we have been engaged in the past 13 months if he does not believe that he has occasionally raised a point that has caused us to pause in that debate.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Can the Secretary of State confirm to the House that the first position paper ever given to the Government was given by the united Unionists when we engaged in talks with his predecessor? Will he also confirm that at the last meeting that he had with Unionist leaders a position paper was given to him and that we have given him other position papers during the talks? Will he now please confirm to the House the definition that is now accepted by his Government of widespread support? Is he saying to the House that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was given widespread support, or that that widespread support does not come from Ulster but that it is widespread as long as Dublin goes with it, because Dublin stopped him from making a statement in this House on 5 July?

Mr. Brooke: In the terms of the first two questions put by the hon. Gentleman, I so confirm what he said. Position papers were put to my predecessor and myself by the Unionist parties. I reiterate, however, that I do not believe that we shall be able to reach a constitutional framework in terms not only of Northern Ireland, but of relations with the Government of the Republic arising therefrom unless there is a broad support for it across the community.

Mr. McNamara: Last week the Secretary of State spoke about putting up the shutters on the negotiations and today he anticipated that they would come to a conclusion. However, last week, having received the proposals from the Irish Government, he seemed to show a degree of greater optimism, but I am not quite sure how one measures the degree of greatness. Unfortunately, the right hon. Gentleman was unable to give, for reasons we well understand, those proposals to the Unionist leaders last Thursday, but he has said that he is prepared to test the present procedures to destruction. May I inform the right hon. Gentleman that the Opposition would prefer him to continue to test and probe and that we hope that all the parties concerned will consider the seriousness of the consequences should the talking cease? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House when he hopes to meet again the leaders of the Northern Ireland parties and representatives of the Irish Government as that will give us a better picture of what has been going on in the past 18 months?

Mr. Brooke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the support that he gives to the process in which we are engaged and for urging us to continue with it. I have already said that I believe that matters are likely to come to a conclusion in the reasonably near future. By definition, that will not be a unilateral or arbitrary act on my part and it will involve, of course, conversations with all the others concerned.

Rural Towns

7. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals for the regeneration of small rural towns.

Mr. Needham: In March last year the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and the International Fund for Ireland joined together in a £16 million initiative specifically aimed at the regeneration of Northern Ireland's disadvantaged smaller towns. Assistance has been approved for Coalisland and Castlederg and a number of proposals for other small towns and villages are well advanced.

Mr. Knapman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Unfortunately good news rarely hits the headlines. Can he say how many towns and villages are likely to benefit under this excellent scheme?

Mr. Needham: A large number of towns and villages in Northern Ireland need to benefit and will benefit. Established throughout Northern Ireland are a large number of community projects, including Armagh, Newry, Carrickfergus, Strabane and the Tyrone development association, all working together cross-community. The projects involve councillors, usually Members of Parliament, community groups and voluntary groups, all trying to bring success and regeneration in the face of a long history of violence and an image of terrorism. Anybody going to those towns will see the determination of the local people to get together to find a better future. It is being shown physically in the towns that I have mentioned.

Mr. John D. Taylor: While the urban development grants are welcome, does the Minister recognise that generally they are restricted to smaller towns and villages in the western part of the Province? Does he recognise that many small towns and villages in counties Down and Antrim in the eastern part of the Province are being denied grants and feel that they are being discriminated against? Will he look into the possibility of extending urban development grants to smaller towns and villages in the eastern part of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: It is possible for disadvantaged towns or areas of towns to come forward under the CRISP initiative with plans and programmes. The areas that have worked together, often with the support and backing of the local Member of Parliament, have come much further than the others, which do not have the same degree of consensus. The concept that we are adopting is the same in principle for all towns throughout Northern Ireland. Clearly, we are making sure that we deal first with the most disadvantaged.

Community Relations Officers

8. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many district councils have agreed to use Government funds to appoint community relations officers; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: All 26 district councils have been invited to submit proposals to improve community relations in their areas. The proposals should include the appointment of a community relations officer and programmes to develop cross-community contact and increase mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

To date, 10 district councils have appointed community relations officers and eight others are expected to appoint officers in the near future. Discussions about policy and programmes are continuing with a further five councils.

Mr. Moss: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the development of community relations is a major help in defeating terrorism through the promotion of better understanding between communities? How does his Department propose to help in the funding of district council community relations officers?

Dr. Mawhinney: I agree with my hon. Friend and thank him for his comments. To the extent that people understand each other better and misunderstanding and mythology are removed, so communities have greater cohesion and greater common ground. On funding, the budget for the programme for next year is about £1 million and the Government will pay 75 per cent. of agreed costs.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: In congratulating Belfast city council on maintaining its proposed rates in line with inflation, does the Minister agree that it would be better to employ community relations officers directly and second them to the city council and to the district councils? Would not that be a better solution to rate increases?

Dr. Mawhinney: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that 10 councils have already accepted funding on the basis that I outlined and eight others are about to do so. I can see no reason why Belfast should be treated differently. Given the behaviour and some of the debates that have taken place in Belfast recently, community relations still have some way to go within the council chamber, never mind outside it.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Minister find it strange that his proposal for the appointment of community relations officers has found great acceptance among Provisional Sinn Fein in local government? Does he also find it strange that in Magherafelt district council recently, Provisional Sinn Fein voted for the appointment of community relations officers under the Minister's scheme, yet at the next meeting, after a bomb which was designed to destroy and mutilate the residents of Magherafelt, Provisional Sinn Fein would not condemn the IRA for its action? Is that the sort of community relations office that we shall have in the future?

Dr. Mawhinney: I repeat what I said when I paid a visit to see that bomb damage in Magherafelt—that I was pleased that Magherafelt council had unanimously voted to accept the proposal. That is the best of all cross-community support. I think that there is some merit in the hon. Gentleman's comments about Sinn Fein.

Social Security Fraud

9. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the detection and prosecution of social security fraud in the province.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): The Government are giving high priority to detecting and prosecuting social security fraud. More staff are now engaged and we are up to 107 in the Province; more cases have been uncovered, with 1,000 people prosecuted last year; and greater savings have been realised, of over £6 million this year. We shall maintain our efforts against fraud in the interest of all, but we must also encourage anyone entitled to benefit to claim.

Mr. Brown: Is the Minister aware of the scathing Public Accounts Committee report on this issue which was discussed in the House in 1987? If not, will he ask the present Secretary of State about it, as he was the Paymaster General at the Treasury when the matter was debated? Is it not a fact that the Government are unable to inquire into the extent of social security fraud in Northern Ireland because of gangsterism and because the Conservative party is tolerating much higher levels of abuse than it would tolerate in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hanley: I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that he is talking absolute rubbish. We are completely in tune with the normal ways of trying to combat social security fraud. We understand entirely the sensitivity of the issue, and that makes the job much more difficult to tackle there than in Great Britain. We have restructured the Department, extra staff are deployed, we give them extensive training and we give them very good guidance indeed. They perform an extremely courageous task. New computer systems have been installed to help detection and staff have been deployed where the risks are greatest.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: We congratulate the Minister on looking after the public distribution of public money. Has he considered looking at the situation where some fraudulent claims are made out of need as opposed to those that are made out of greed?

Mr. Hanley: Claims should never be made out of greed. There are plenty of allowable parts of the social security system that allow those in need to claim. Indeed, we encourage people to claim. We have information and advice centres and a free line telephone system, so people should not go without.

Coronary Disease

10. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new intitiatives he is proposing to combat coronary heart disease.

Mr. Hanley: The "Change of Heart" coronary prevention programme launched in 1986 has been at the forefront of the strategy to reduce preventable illness and death and will be further developed in the coming years by the recently established Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend will be well aware that Northern Ireland has the highest incidence of heart disease

in the world. Does he agree that this is a serious situation which calls for a major campaign of education in diet and health? Does he feel that the general practitioners of Ulster have a part to play in teaching people how to look after themselves and thereby reduce the incidence of heart disease in the Province?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend's knowledge of this matter is well known, but I am pleased to say that the figures he has given are not quite accurate. Northern Ireland no longer has the worst record in the world. Over the past 10 years, the number of deaths from heart disease has fallen by about 25 per cent., and now stands at about 4,500 a year. Following the introduction of the new general practitioner contract last year, there are encouraging signs that GPs are taking a much more active role in promoting health through the establishment of health promotion clinics and centres.

Kilroot Power Station

11. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current position regarding the construction of phase II of Kilroot power station.

Mr. Needham: Construction of phase II of Kilroot cannot begin until decisions are taken on whether the station is to be coal/oil-fired or gas-fired. The provision of a supply of natural gas to Northern Ireland for use in power generation is being urgently explored.

Mr. Foulkes: Has the Minister checked his files? If he has, he will realise that I have been raising this matter year after year after year. There is an empty shell at Kilroot, and Northern Ireland Electricity wants to build phase II there. We in Ayrshire have low-sulphur coal, which is ready to be shipped to Northern Ireland. Why is the decision taking so long?

Mr. Needham: Because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, Northern Ireland is one of the poorest parts of the United Kingdom and, whatever we do, we must ensure that energy prices are as low as possible. If we were to have coal-fired generation at Kilroot phase II it would require flue gas desulphurisation, whereas gas generation would not. We want to try to get a gas supply into Northern Ireland.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir Hal Miller:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

Sir Hal Miller: Does my right hon. Friend agree that reductions in interest rates following a fall in inflation will sharpen the already competitive position of our motor industry which increased exports last year by 18 per cent? Are not rising exports, rising investment and increased skill levels proof positive that we are achieving what Labour claims to want, and that we should stick with our policies, rather than cut and run?

The Prime Minister: I can scarcely disagree with my hon. Friend. The motor industry has a very impressive export record, which is a tribute to good design, increasing competitiveness and the increasing work rate of employees in the industry.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to explain to the 110,000 people who lost their jobs in the course of the last month that they did so as a direct result of his incompetent economic policy?

The Prime Minister: It is interesting that during the 40 months in which unemployment fell, month after month after month, the right hon. Gentleman made no mention of this matter. I regret the rise in unemployment, but the right hon. Gentleman will have to concede that the level of unemployment in this country, at 6·6 per cent., is not only well below the European Community average but very well below the average levels of most of our European partners.

Mr. Kinnock: Today's figures show the biggest January rise in unemployment since 1981—the time of the last Tory slump. When the Conservatives have done this twice in a decade—regardless of who has been the leader, or who the Chancellor—is it any wonder that they will always be known as the party of unemployment?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman may find it difficult to explain the following unemployment rates: 9 per cent. in France, 9·9 per cent. in Italy, 9·3 per cent. in Canada, and 6·6 per cent. here. He may also have overlooked the fact that there has been a considerable rise in the number of job vacancies.

Mr. Kinnock: Perhaps the Prime Minister—who is the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, not of France—will explain why, if Tory policies are to work, hundreds of thousands of people have to stop working.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's track record on such predictions is simply not good. He will recall predicting that mass unemployment of 6 million was inevitable. It was not, and his predictions now are wrong.

Sir Anthony Grant: When my right hon. Friend reflects today on the position in the Gulf, will he consider that a dictator like Saddam Hussein, who has been unscrupulous enough to murder his own people over several years, will probably have no scruples about allowing innocent people to suffer in a bombing raid for propaganda purposes?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the tragic event in Baghdad and the sad loss of life should not mean that a single allied soldier should be put at risk by a premature land assault?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, we shall consider very carefully when it is right to launch a land assault. The position in that regard remains as I have described to the House in the past. Everyone regrets the death of civilians, particularly in the tragic circumstances of the past few hours. But the United States has explained why it attacked that particular site: it did so on the basis of an assessment that showed that it was a legitimate military target, which played a part in the Iraqi war effort.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister agree that, in considering the lessons of the terrible tragedy that took place in Baghdad last night, we should not forget that Saddam Hussein has, not through inadvertence, but

through acts of deliberate policy, killed more Muslims than any other living person? Does he also agree that, as the terrible toll of the war rises, so should our determination to build a just and durable peace to follow it?

Will the Prime Minister answer the question that I fear he dodged last week and say whether he is prepared to give the United Nations, in whose name we are fighting the war, the lead role in building the peace that follows?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the observations that the right hon. Gentleman made at the outset of his question. To avoid doubt, I shall repeat the point that the allies are not targeting civilians, unlike Saddam Hussein, who continues to fire missiles wholly indiscriminately at built-up population centres. On the subject of the United Nations, clearly we must consider with all our colleagues in the allied forces, particularly the Arab states upon and around whose lands the conflict is taking place, how to proceed at the end of the conflict.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of the House on his successful visit to Germany on Monday? If he will forgive the pun, far from being a "brugeing" experience, it was a successful visit, both bilaterally and in terms of the resuscitation of European solidarity?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is important to ensure that we play a leading part in the centre of the Community, which means that we have the closest possible bilateral contact with all our European partners.

Q2. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Prime Minister if the will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nellist: Was yesterday's massacre of women and children in Amiriya a good example, under the 1977 Geneva protocol, of precision targeting of the right or wrong target? Was not the burning and lasceration of those children's bodies, to correctly use a military euphemism, the degrading of nobody in Baghdad but of those in whose name that slaughter took place?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman puts the matter with his customary bad taste and inaccuracy. As I explained a moment ago, there has been precision bombing, and that site was bombed because there was legitimate reason to believe that it was a military target.

Q3. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. David Nicholson: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the concern at the advertising and the unsolicited temptations to borrow pursued by banks and other lenders in recent years, for which many businesses and many individuals are now paying a painful price.

As interest rates come down, will my right hon. Friend use his influence as Prime Minister, as former Chancellor and as a former banker to impress on the banking industry the need for responsible lending—and will he consider what role the Government might play in that?

The Prime Minister: I have done as my hon. Friend suggests. My views on this subject are well known. I am very glad to see that the banks and building societies are addressing the issue of the marketing and provision of credit. As the banks have freely acknowledged, the code that they have covers only banks and building societies. That is why, in December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry issued a consultative document proposing a number of specific changes to tighten the law on consumer credit. These measures will have a wider field of application than just banks and building societies.

Q4. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Armstrong: Did the Prime Minister notice the figures published yesterday that show that the top 20 local education authorities providing nursery education are Labour, and the bottom 20 are Tory? Given the abysmal performance of Tory authorities, when the Secretary of State for Education and Science two weeks ago abandoned any commitment to the expansion of nursery education, did he have the Prime Minister's approval?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady should look at the whole provision of education services throughout the country, and if she is looking at lists of the top and the bottom authorities she should also look at the authorities with the highest community charges.

Q5. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to send a message of congratulations to the voluntary bodies and statutory agencies that have worked so hard during the past few days to provide shelter for the homeless in London? Will he note the comments of the deputy director of Shelter, who said the other day that the arrangements made were magnificent and excellent?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating all those involved—particularly the voluntary organisations that have co-operated so willingly with my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning. As a result of that swift response there should be no need for anyone to sleep rough on the streets of London during this period of extreme bad weather.

Q6. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Foulkes: What is the Prime Minister going to do now that John Yates, the highly respected NHS management consultant appointed by the Government to advise on reducing waiting lists, has resigned, describing

the Government's policy, of spending £100 million to find out that waiting lists have increased, as a total waste of money? Would not it be better to sack the Secretary of State for Health and keep Mr. Yates?

The Prime Minister: As it happens, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health invited Mr. Yates to see him to discuss the reduction in waiting lists. Mr. Yates refused.

Q7. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hague: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to reflect on the successful expansion of higher education under this Administration? Are not the one in five school leavers going into further and higher education, compared with the miserable one in eight when Labour was in power, a crucial part of building a better trained and educated workforce? Are not this Government providing the resources for that?

The Prime Minister: Indeed they are. My hon. Friend is right and I entirely agree with his remarks about the importance of higher education—both universities and polytechnics—and the role that they are playing in trying to equip our young people for a better start in life.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Is the Prime Minister truly aware of the crisis facing agriculture, with farm incomes at their lowest in real terms since the second world war and record numbers leaving the industry? Why then is the Ministry of Defence supplying Argentine and Uruguayan beef to British forces in the Gulf when British cold stores are jam packed with intervention beef, subsidised and paid for by British taxpayers? Will the right hon. Gentleman assist taxpayers, the armed forces and agriculture by sorting that out?

The Prime Minister: It is because of such absurdities that we are keen to see a proper reform of the common agricultural policy. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made it clear that that is a top priority for us and we shall seek to negotiate it with our colleagues in Europe.

Q8. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that today's problems of homelessness have been caused, first, by the way in which the private rented sector has been regulated almost out of existence and, secondly, by the incompetence of many local authorities, mainly Labour controlled, which have more than 100,000 vacant council houses up and down the country? *[Interruption.]* Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to confirm that the Government will take the necessary radical action to free and deregulate the private rented sector in order to bring many hundreds of thousands of empty flats and rooms back on to the market?

The Prime Minister: Nothing could better have illustrated the Opposition's hostility to the private rented sector than their activities while my hon. Friend asked his question. It was absurd that the private rented sector was declining and properties were left empty because of rent control. We have introduced to the subsidy arrangements all sorts of incentives to encourage local authorities to bring properties into use. We continue to examine further ways to stimulate the private sector.

Q9. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: What does the Prime Minister have to say to the record number of 40,000 home owners who had their homes repossessed during the past 12 months as a result of his high interest rates policy? What advice does he give those people?

The Prime Minister: All repossessions are a tragedy for those who are involved. The hon. Gentleman should bear it in mind that repossessions account for less than one fifth of 1 per cent. of home owners and that the overwhelming majority of those are as a result of marriage breakdown.

Librarian (Retirement)

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have received a letter from the Librarian indicating his wish to retire on 5 July this year. I will arrange for the text of his letter to be published in the *Official Report*.

Dr. Menhennet has worked in the Library for some 37 years and has held the office of Librarian during the past 15 years, a time of dramatic development in the range of Library services and the demands made upon them. I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House will join me in thanking Dr. Menhennet for his distinguished service to the House and, at the same time, will acknowledge the incomparable help provided to us by the Library as a whole. I have appointed Mr. Dermot Englefield, the Deputy Librarian, to succeed Dr. Menhennet from 6 July.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I should like to associate the whole House with the tribute that you, Mr. Speaker, have paid to the Librarian and with the thanks that you have expressed to the staff of the Library working under his leadership.

During his nine years as Deputy Librarian and his 15 years as Librarian, Dr. Menhennet has overseen extensive development of the Library in many ways. He is well respected by fellow heads of Department, staff of the House, his own staff and, of course, by hon. Members and our staff. On behalf of the House, I should also like to convey our sincere gratitude to him for all that he has done and to wish him well for a long and happy retirement.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I associate myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends with your thanks, Mr. Speaker, and those of the Leader of the House to the Librarian.

David Menhennet has been not only a great servant of the House but a friend to many hon. Members. He has guided the Library through many important changes, wide extensions of services to Members, and huge improvements to the information and resources that are available to us all. He deserves our thanks and congratulations on his tremendous effort and on the way that he has carried out his duties in the interests of the whole House. We thank him warmly.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Having been in this place for 40 years, may I, on behalf of the generality of hon. Members, say how much the service provided to Members by the Library staff has improved and is improving? We readily acknowledge the influence that the Librarian has brought to bear during his term of office. For that, I say on behalf of my colleagues, "Thank you."

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): My right hon. and hon. Friends wish to be associated with the tribute that has been paid to Dr. Menhennet and with the good wishes that have been expressed. His quiet competence, objectivity, and readiness to serve Members personified the qualities of the Library itself which we have come to admire so much.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): As the Chairman of the Library Sub-Committee for the past nine years, I associate my Committee and the Services Committee with the tributes that have been paid to the service of Dr. Menhennet. For the past 15 years, the Library has been headed by a remarkable duo who have seen through the tremendous changes to which you, Mr. Speaker, made reference.

As Dr. Menhennet leaves, I can think of no finer successor to welcome to the post of Librarian than Mr. Dermot Englefield.

Following is the text of the letter:

Dear Mr. Speaker

I write to inform you of my wish to retire, later this year, from the office of Librarian of the House of Commons which I have had the honour to hold since 1 July 1976. I therefore place my office at your disposal with effect from 6 July 1991.

I have had the great privilege and pleasure of working in the Library for some 37 years, and of seeing its services to the House and to Members develop and grow, just as the needs of Members themselves for better information and research services have grown. First as Deputy Librarian and then as Librarian, I have had the great good fortune to be associated with those developments. Such growth could not have taken place without the support, friendly interest and encouragement of Members on all sides of the House, and the advice and guidance of the Library Sub-Committee of the Services Committee. As a member of the Board of Management since it was first established, I have also been very conscious of the goodwill and understanding of my colleagues, both inside and outside the Department of the Library.

For all that, but most especially for the honour of serving the House as its Librarian during the last 15 years, I am and will remain deeply grateful.

Yours sincerely

David Menhennet

Librarian

Business of the House

3.35 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 18 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Maintenance Enforcement Bill [*Lords*].

Committee and remaining stages of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 19 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (7th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The Impact of the Poll Tax".

Afterwards there will be a debate on another Opposition motion entitled "The Impact of Government Policies on Manufacturing Industry".

WEDNESDAY 20 FEBRUARY—Progress of remaining stages of the Criminal Justice Bill.

THURSDAY 21 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (8th Allotted Day, 1st part). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Gulf War Aims and the Restoration of Peace in the Region". The debate will arise on an Opposition motion in the name of the Scottish National party.

Remaining stages of the Representation of the People Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

FRIDAY 22 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 25 FEBRUARY—Conclusion of remaining stages of Criminal Justice Bill.

Dr. Cunningham: I begin by congratulating the Leader of the House on his 54th birthday—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is that all?

Dr. Cunningham: —and wishing him many happy returns to the Opposition Benches.

Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that the House will have a debate on Welsh affairs as close as possible to 1 March, which is St. David's day, so that we may have the traditional annual debate on all aspects of affairs in the Principality?

Whilst affairs in the Gulf have understandably overlain many other issues, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on important developments in countries in central and eastern Europe, with particular reference to the assistance given to them by Britain and the European Community? That is a very important issue in European terms, and I hope that time can be found to debate it.

When may we debate the Government's public expenditure White Paper? We understand the Government's continuing reluctance to provide time for such debates, given the deepening crisis and the widening and damaging economic recession—highlighted again today by a dreadful increase in unemployment and appalling figures for the reposession of houses because people are no longer able to keep up their mortgage payments. There is widespread concern, particularly on this side of the House, about the continuing failures of Government policy in that area. We are entitled to a debate on the public expenditure White Paper, and I hope that we shall have one soon.

Mr. MacGregor: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind good wishes on my birthday. For the first time in my life, I found myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), when he remarked from a sedentary position, "Is that all?" in relation to the number of years.

I confirm that it is our intention to have the traditional debate on Welsh affairs at around the time of St. David's day.

European Community aid to the Soviet Union is, I agree, a very important matter. As I have said on other occasions, I hope very much to find a suitable opportunity for us to consider it before long.

There is absolutely no "continuing reluctance" on the part of the Government to arrange a public expenditure debate. I do not know how the hon. Gentleman can say that, given that we had a full debate yesterday on the economy and the various matters that he has raised—the debate on the autumn statement. I agree, however, that a further debate should replace the traditional White Paper debate, and we intend to organise one. Given that we no longer have the original public expenditure White Paper, I think that the arrangement and timing of any such debate is best left to the usual channels.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me again remind the House that this is an Opposition day, and that many hon. Members wish to participate in the debates on agriculture and fisheries. I ask hon. Members to confine their questions to next week's business rather than raising more general matters, and to speak briefly.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend pay some attention next week to the results of the first two sittings of the European Standing Committees? He has promised to review them at the end of the year, but other matters have arisen relating not to procedure but to the workings of the Committees—papers have not been available, for instance, and it is felt that not enough time was provided. It would be very helpful if my right hon. Friend referred to a letter that he will have received from the Chairmen of the first two Committees, and decided whether it would be possible to deal with those criticisms as soon as possible.

Mr. MacGregor: I said last week that, given that the European Standing Committees are a new experiment, teething troubles would be likely, as well as the need for a review at the end of the summer. I am therefore prepared to consider issues that arise in the early stages.

I have seen the letter that my hon. Friend mentioned, and will respond. I am considering the points raised in it. The Standing Committees will not be sitting next week, partly to ensure that we can make all the papers available. I cannot guarantee that that will always be possible, however, because they frequently arrive fairly late from the European Community. Certainly I am anxious to do all that I can to make the new experiment a success.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am sure that the Leader of the House is aware of the evacuation of the Tartan Alpha platform earlier this week, which is a

[Mr. James Wallace]

reminder of the fact that working in the offshore oil industry is still a very hazardous occupation. Can he assure us that not much more dust will gather on the Cullen report before the House has an opportunity to debate it?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have accepted all Lord Cullen's recommendations and conclusions, and are acting to implement as many as possible with all practicable speed. I am sorry that we have not so far been able to find an opportunity to debate the matter. As is clear from the number of important issues that hon. Members are raising, it is difficult to fit them all in, but I still intend to arrange a debate on this topic as soon as I can.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): As the Government have now become deeply embroiled in the aviation dispute with the United States stemming from the application of United Airlines of the USA to take over the Pan Am routes, should not the Secretary of State for Transport report next week on the current state of the negotiations? Would it not be a good idea for him also to mention that some of us are becoming rather tired of the nonsense whereby Governments intervene in decisions relating to the level of transatlantic air fares? We feel that such decisions should be left to the marketplace, and should relate to what the airlines believe they can charge, subject only to predatory action.

Mr. MacGregor: I am bearing in mind what you said, Mr. Speaker, about the anxiety of many hon. Members to speak in the following important debate. I shall therefore confine myself to procedural points and will not deal with any policy points raised by my hon. Friend or any other hon. Member.

We must consider when it would be appropriate for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to inform the House of the state of the negotiations, and I shall discuss that with him in the light of what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Tony Benn: (Chesterfield): Does the Leader of the House recall that, when I asked last week about Government statements on the Gulf, he assured us that such statements would be made as necessary? This week there have been the horrific casualties in Baghdad and the British Government's decision to try to make the Security Council meet in secret so as to stifle criticism of what is happening. There have also been crucial discussions in America, in which the Secretary of State for Defence took part, about the timing of the land war, which might lead to many casualties among British troops.

Is it not clear that the Government do not wish the House to discuss these matters? Were it not for the fact that the Scottish National party has tabled a motion this week, is it not clear that the Government would have had no intention of involving Parliament in something that concerns the lives of many thousands of people, including our own troops and their anxious families waiting at home?

Mr. MacGregor: No, that is not the case. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there were questions to the Foreign Secretary yesterday. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I review regularly when there should be a debate or a statement. Certainly we are open to representations from Members in all parts of the House about that. I welcome next week's debate, which will give the House another opportunity to discuss these matters. I shall continue to review carefully when further statements should be made.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Does it not strike my right hon. Friend as bizarre that British correspondents and cameramen are in the very heartland of enemy territory pumping back information which is almost wholly in favour of Saddam Hussein and his evil intents? Does he not think that we ought to address that matter next week?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that many of my hon. Friends and hon. Members generally, as well as members of the public, feel strongly about that issue. Representations have been made to the broadcasting authorities along those lines. That, of course, is a matter that can be raised in next week's debate.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is it not extraordinary that, in the week that is to follow the announcement of the awful unemployment figures, there is to be neither a debate nor any other opportunity to discuss the catastrophic effect that unemployment is having on the lives of our constituents? Does the Minister not realise that, while he and his colleagues have their jobs, those of everyone else are at risk?

Mr. MacGregor: We had a full debate on the economy yesterday.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): When does my right hon. Friend expect to reintroduce the War Crimes Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give a precise date, but we have given a clear commitment to do so.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Notwithstanding the fact that later today there is to be a debate on the fishing industry, can the Leader of the House assure us that the prayer which has been tabled against Statutory Instrument 139 will be debated in the near future, given that four Opposition parties have tabled prayers against the statutory instrument and that amendments to the statutory instrument have been tabled before we have even discussed it?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not wish to give an absolute assurance now; we must see how today's debate goes. However, I shall certainly consider the matter after the debate.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Leader of the House consult the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and ensure that next week the Secretary of State makes a statement on the new evidence that has emerged about the imprisonment of four Ulster Defence Regiment members who are serving time in Armagh prison for murder? Will he draw the Secretary of State's attention to the fact that the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which has been engaged in forensic tests of the so-called confessions, has now got the results of those confessions but will not release them? Will he ensure that the results of the forensic tests are released?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall draw to my right hon. Friend's attention the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will remember that yesterday I asked whether a statement would be made today on that very subject. In the light of the Secretary of State's earlier comment—that there should be debates in which Northern Ireland Members of Parliament could participate—he ought to bear in mind that this is the only place where representatives of Northern Ireland can deal with such issues. Should there not be a statement next week on an issue that affects servants of the Crown?

Mr. MacGregor: I note that the hon. Gentleman has also raised this point. I can only repeat that I shall discuss it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to see early-day motion 459 on the talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade and on the British textile industry?

[That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government to press for the early re-opening of the GATT talks; and calls upon them to recognise the vital importance of the British textile industries, both regionally and nationally, which will be undermined unless there is an orderly transitional period of at least 10 years into the new system of international trade which must include effective anti-dumping measures.]

I am sure that he is aware of the great importance of the industry to many areas of the country, not least to my own constituency. May we have a fairly lengthy debate on those matters in the very near future?

Mr. MacGregor: I well understand my hon. Friend's interest in the matter and I am also well aware of its importance. On the GATT talks, informal discussions are taking place under the auspices of the GATT director-general and they are continuing with a view to restarting formal negotiations as soon as possible. We must see exactly how they develop. I will bear in mind the point about a debate. However, I must stress that we have a heavy programme. Many subjects for debate have been raised and it will not be possible to accommodate them all.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is Mr. Bill Pinkney going to buy the transport section of the Crown Suppliers? I have repeatedly asked the Leader of the House to arrange for a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have nothing to add at this stage to what I said last week.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Could my right hon. Friend arrange to have a debate very soon on the "Options for Change" in the defence review? May we discuss especially the facilities for training for our armed services? It has been demonstrated in the Gulf conflict how good our training has been. Hon. Members of all parties would like to express their views on many of the facilities in West Germany that are now to be withdrawn or that are under threat in constituencies such as mine—I refer to the Portland naval base in south Dorset.

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, we have normal arrangements for debates on defence matters and for services days. I cannot give a date now for when those debates will be, but that will, of course, be an opportunity to raise the points that my hon. Friend has in mind.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): In view of early-day motion 468, may we have from next week more regular ministerial statements if necessary daily, about the conduct of the Gulf war?

[That this House condemns the barbaric slaughter of innocent men, women and children in Baghdad, which was caused by bombing.]

When was the last time that a British Government were collectively responsible for the massacre of 500 innocent civilians and then sought refuge in a secret session of the United Nations Security Council in an effort to avoid adverse publicity and public scrutiny? Will the Leader of the House next recommend secret sessions of Parliament in case the public find out the truth about that senseless and destructive conflict?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister answered questions on large parts of those points.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is concern that the Iraqi embassy may have been storing arms and ammunition, and that some of Iraq's friends may be coming into the country with arms and ammunition in the diplomatic bag? As there is a legal right under the Vienna convention to go into the premises of a former mission and inspect it, and to inspect electronically the diplomatic bag, will my right hon. Friend invite the Foreign Secretary to come to the House next week to reassure us by making a statement that in no circumstances will any embassy or any ambassador's staff be allowed to bring into the country, or to store, arms and ammunition that might be used for terrorist purposes in Britain?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. and learned Friend knows of action that has already been taken in many ways in relation to the embassy here. I will discuss his point with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): We are to have a debate next week on the Criminal Justice Bill. Is the Leader of the House aware of the utter revulsion of hon. Members of all parties and of the general public about a decision by the Court of Appeal this week to free two people who had been convicted of brutality towards a young child that led to that child's death? They were released because of a loophole in the law. Will the right hon. Gentleman have a word with the Home Secretary to ensure that no other child abusers who are now in prison will use the same legal loophole to get their freedom as that used by the two who have just been released?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not had a chance to study that case in full to see whether it points to a gap in the law, although, on the face of it, it looks as though it may not do so. We are to devote two days to the Criminal Justice Bill—one day next week and the following Monday—because of the importance of that Bill and the numerous issues to which it gives rise. I hope that during those two days it will be possible to deal with all aspects of the Bill. The hon. Gentleman has raised a separate point, and I cannot say now whether there is a case for a statement to be made or for action to be taken.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider his answer to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)? Surely it is extraordinary that we should not be given a full day's debate in Government time at a time when we have huge forces committed in the Gulf and serious matters that need to be discussed by hon. Members on both sides of the House and on which strong views are held. Above all, will my right hon. Friend take it from me that the Government's apathy over the reaction of our constituents to the grotesquely disloyal reporting of the war by ITN and the BBC needs airing in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: On the latter point, I said earlier that representations had been made to the broadcasting authorities and some of my right hon. Friends have made clear the views that have been expressed to us. I very much share the thinking behind my hon. Friend's point. I am prepared to look for an appropriate opportunity for another full day's debate. We are to have a half day's debate next week, and I am certainly prepared to continue to examine the matter through the usual channels.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Foreign Secretary be making a statement tomorrow on the Security Council meeting? Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why the British delegates called for the meeting to be held in secret? Can he also tell us what plans are being made for humanitarian aid to be given to hospitals in Kuwait and Iraq, bearing in mind the fact that many of them are without electricity, water and medical supplies? Who will speak on Thursday on the Government's behalf about the war aims, given that, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, the war aims of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary are contradictory?

Mr. MacGregor: I reject absolutely all the hon. Gentleman's points about policy. I cannot say whether there will be a statement tomorrow, as we judge these matters by the day.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): As my right hon. Friend seemed to suggest that a saint's day was the right day for a debate on Welsh affairs, may I suggest that he carries that precedent further and makes the other United Kingdom saints' days days for debates on the affairs of Northern Ireland, Scotland and England?

Mr. MacGregor: We have other opportunities to discuss the affairs of each of the other home territories. My hon. Friend has made an ingenious suggestion, but, given the many other demands on our time, I am not sure that I can give him an absolute guarantee that I shall entertain the idea.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): In view of the dramatically worsening unemployment figures that are hitting Wales—and probably the regions of England—is it not time that we had a statement and a debate on regional policy, especially in the light of the changes taking place in the European Community and the development of relationships between the regions and EC institutions? Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made at an early date and for a debate as soon as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: We have recently had rather a lot of debates on economic and industrial matters, and they affect regional affairs. I have already told the House that we are to have another debate on public expenditure and that will clearly also involve the discussion of regional affairs. There will also be an opportunity for such discussion in the debate next Wednesday.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Given the events of last week and the IRA attack on Downing street, will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether a review has yet been undertaken of the security of this House and the other place? Could any news of that be given to us next week?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, indeed. Fairly regular reviews take place and the House will know that, some time ago, a considerable number of extra steps were taken to tighten security. Some of them are fairly open and manifest and obvious to hon. Members. It is perhaps not best practice to refer to all the measures that have been taken, but I can assure my hon. Friend that a considerable programme of further measures—on top of all that we had before—has been undertaken.

Ms. Diane Abbott: (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Leader of the House aware that many people, both pro and anti the Gulf war, believe that the time given in this Parliament to open discussion of the war compares unfavourably with the United States Congress and its committee system? Will he make time for a full debate on the United Nations? Some of us believe that the role of the United Nations in this war could bear examination and that the use of the United Nations to front the military mobilisation is a perversion of the United Nations' aims.

Will the right hon. Gentleman note that, whereas the Prime Minister constantly uses resolution 678 to justify an invasion of Iraq, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who ought to know, when challenged, says that he cannot say whether an invasion of Iraq would be in line with the resolutions? If the Secretary-General of the United Nations does not know, how can the Prime Minister be so sure?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Lady's question raises matters of policy, not procedure. On procedural matters, I have not yet seen the motion for next Thursday's debate, but it would seem from the title that some of the matters to which she referred could be raised then.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate next week on the policies of the Labour Lambeth council, which seems to want deliberately to cause homelessness? First, it has yet to issue planning permission for a major hostel project into which millions of pounds of Government money have been put. Secondly, over a long period it has denied housing benefits which are due to existing hostels, thereby putting the hostels' existence in jeopardy. If that is a policy of seeking to cause homelessness, we should know it.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend raises briefly some important points. I hope that he will find opportunities to raise them further in the House because I agree that they are important. However, I cannot promise him a debate in Government time next week.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): In view of comments made during Northern Ireland questions this afternoon, which made it fairly clear that the so-called initiative of the Secretary of State is about, in his words, to arrive at a conclusion, will the Leader of the House agree that there

is no excuse for not giving effect to the views of the Procedure Committee on the establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland? Does he further agree that it is wrong for a Department to be allowed to block the creation of a Select Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry that I could not be present during questions, so I do not know what was said. I have no further progress to report on the Committee.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this month is the 50th anniversary of the Air Training Corps and that many thousands of young men serving in the Gulf with the Royal Air Force are former members of it? Is he aware that there are 36,000 young boys and girls in the corps? May we have an early opportunity to debate the fact that young people in Britain have come forward during the past 50 years to volunteer to serve Crown and country?

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad to pay my tribute to the work of the corps and all those who have served in it. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to make his point even more fully in our debates on the armed services.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): May we have a debate on Thames Water and the failure of privatisation? I think, for example, of the failure to restore water supplies in St. Stephen's house, where many staff are having to work in virtually insanitary conditions. May we have an early debate, or at least some action on the matter?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will have seen the note sent to the occupants of St. Stephen's house. He will realise that there are difficulties at present with the water supply in central London. I do not see that it is possible to have a debate.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Surely we need to have a debate on the disastrous state of the GATT talks as soon as possible. Is my right hon. Friend aware that import controls, which now cover a range of products, from steel to cars and food to shoes, cost the average British family more than the poll tax? Therefore, should we not pay more attention to the issues in the House, especially bearing in mind our position as one of the major trading nations?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government greatly regretted the suspension of the GATT negotiations in December. We are doing all that we can to ensure that the valuable progress which has been made up to that point is not lost. I fully agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the matter. The need to reach a conclusion to the GATT round is very important.

There is a difficulty about holding a debate as we need to know at what time it would be right to have the issue raised again in the House. We need to know what progress has been made and to hold the debate at a time that is appropriate in that context.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 449?

[That this House welcomes the mission to Iraq being jointly organised by the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organisation for the delivery of emergency medical supplies for children and mothers and, more generally, to assess health needs; believes this mission to be firmly within the spirit of the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1949, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration of the World Summit for Children which states that 'the essential needs of children and families must be protected even in times of war and in violence-ridden areas' and goes on to ask that 'periods of tranquility and special relief corridors be observed for the benefit of children, where war and violence are still taking place'; recognises the high proportion of young children in the Iraqi population; and further hopes that once the mission has visited Baghdad it will make every effort to inspect the conditions of children and mothers in other centres of war, including Basra and Kuwait.]

This week UNICEF and the World Health Organisation are taking medical supplies to Baghdad for women and children and they will be examining health conditions in Iraq. Given the bombing that took place yesterday and the horrendous scenes we have been shown from Baghdad, would it not be particularly appropriate for us to discuss the subject?

Mr. MacGregor: We welcome the proposal to send a World Health Organisation and UNICEF mission to Iraq to deliver emergency medical supplies. Experience from similar ICRC—International Committee of the Red Cross—missions shows that satisfactory arrangements can be made for such missions without organising pauses in hostilities or relief corridors. This is another issue that could be raised next week.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I urge my right hon. Friend to find time next week to debate early-day motion 448.

[That this House notes with great concern the establishment of a secret society within the Parliamentary Labour Party called The Supper Club; notes that its objectives appear to be distancing Front Bench spokesmen from official Opposition policy, campaigning for a new leader for the party, undermining support for British troops in the Gulf and weakening the authority of United Nations resolutions; and calls for an early debate so that club members can clarify their policies and their preferences for a new leader.]

Conservative Members would find a debate absolutely riveting because the motion, which stands in my name, concerns the revelation of the existence of the parliamentary Labour party's supper club.

The need for a debate is urgent and serious for two reasons. First, we discovered yesterday that Labour Front-Bench spokesmen do not have any economic policies, so if we had a debate next week it might enable the supper club to tell us its economic policies. Secondly, the matter is urgent because it appears that the club is planning to change the leader of the Labour party and we would like to know its candidates.

Mr. MacGregor: I have seen the early-day motion, but my hon. Friend will know that I have no responsibility for the matters referred to therein. It was certainly noticeable in the debate yesterday that there was a total absence of any Labour policies for the future, and I believe that that will become clear in other debates as well.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I am sure that the Leader of the House, who keeps a keen eye on such matters, has seen that I have tabled a ten-minute Bill for consideration next week. The object of

[Mr. William McKelvey]

the Bill is to extract additional money for the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. Will the right hon. Gentleman support the Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: Since the hon. Gentleman knows that I have no further progress to report on the Scottish Affairs Select Committee, and as I have not studied his Bill in detail, it is unlikely that I would want to support it next week. I have already made clear the position in relation to the Select Committee.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the reply that he gave earlier to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)? Will he ensure that, as urgently as possible, the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary make a statement to the House on the horrific civilian casualties now occurring in Iraq and what plans they have to negotiate a ceasefire so that the carnage that has been wrought upon the people of Iraq and Kuwait can come to an end? That would mean that all the problems of the region, none of which will be solved by the war, can be addressed in a peaceful, political way rather than with the barbarism that is being used in the region now.

Mr. MacGregor: I know that the hon. Gentleman shares the views of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn); but I also know that there are not many other hon. Members who do so.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate on railway transport and, in particular, the Department of Transport's guidelines that require British Rail to lengthen a large number of station platforms, without any additional money, to conform with the new rolling stock that has been introduced? That is causing British Rail and the travelling public great concern, because in west Yorkshire, for example, many believe that small useful stations will be closed on health and safety grounds when the real reason is that the Government are forcing cuts on British Rail. This would be a useful subject for debate, because it is important that we have an expanding rail network and not one that is continually circumscribed by Government cuts.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both points. British Rail is expanding in terms of investment and rolling stock; there are not cuts. British Rail's investment is at the highest level in real terms for 30 years. The hon. Gentleman mentioned additional rolling stock. Since 1983, Ministers have approved about £1·8 billion of investment in passenger rolling stock and nearly £400 million in locomotives. So that there is much investment, and the basis of the hon. Gentleman's argument falls. However, if he wishes to raise particular local points, he knows that other means are available for him to do so.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House bring forward next week an up-to-date statement on the efforts of the Government to cadge money from other Governments in order to prosecute the Gulf war? If the Irish nationalists are condemned for raising money in America in order to carry out their wishes regarding Irish nationalism, what is the difference between that and the British and American Governments running around the world touting for money for this American-led mercenary war?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman must know that there is the world of difference. The conflict in Iraq is being undertaken under the auspices of a United Nations resolution, and a large number of Governments are participating. The position is totally different. On the issue that he raised about a statement next week, I suggest that he reads yesterday's debate where he will see that the matter was referred to in the speeches of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The Leader of the House mentioned that there would be opposed private business on Monday between 7 o'clock and 10 o'clock, as though it had nothing to do with him or the Government and was purely a matter for the Chairman of Ways and Means. If that is so—the measure concerned is the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill—how does the right hon. Gentleman explain the existence of a document, a copy of which I have seen, from the Government Chief Whip instructing all Ministers to be present for the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill and the business which follows it, and telling them also to procure the presence of their Parliamentary Private Secretaries? How does he reconcile that with the reply that the Prime Minister gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) in respect of Government whipping on the Southampton Rapid Transit Bill on 5 February, when he said that individual members of the Cabinet vote according to their individual wishes?

Does the Leader of the House agree that the documentary evidence we have shows clearly that private Bills are being passed through the House under the flag of convenience and that they are, in fact, Government measures? Will he agree to refer the matter to the Select Committee on procedure?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, whipping is not for me but for my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary.

BILL PRESENTED

Cold Climate Allowance

Mrs. Margaret Ewing, supported by Mr. Dafydd Elis Thomas, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Alex Salmond, Mr. Andrew Welsh, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mr. James Molyneaux, Mr. Seamus Mallon, Mr. Jim Sillars and Mr. Dick Douglas, presented a Bill to provide for more equitable heating allowances to reflect the increased costs of domestic heating in colder climates; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and order to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 87.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the five motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered.

That the draft Electricity Generators (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Hydro-Electric plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Nuclear Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Power plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Income Tax (Building Societies) (Annual Payments) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Agriculture

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. A large number of hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. I have no authority to limit the length of speeches in a half-day debate, but it would be helpful if hon. Members tried to limit their speeches to 10 minutes and if the Front-Bench spokesmen, of whom there will be four, exercised a self-denying ordinance on the length of their speeches.

4.13 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I beg to move.

That this House condemns Her Majesty's Government for presiding over a crisis in agriculture which has seen 6,000 farmers leave the industry in 1990, real farm incomes fall to their lowest level since the Second World War and farmers' debt increase by £400 million in two years; believes that this crisis already threatens the social and economic structure of rural areas and the livelihoods of many farmers; regrets proposed changes in the Common Agricultural Policy; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to bring forward proposals to protect the agricultural industry by moving support from overproduction to direct support aimed at social and environmental goals by the introduction of countryside management agreements across the country, by enhanced payments for achieving environmental aims, in particular extensification of food production, by marketing initiatives, and by reformed systems of direct support targeted in particular on family farms.

We are debating a serious issue. The purpose of our calling the debate is to try to restore confidence in an ailing agricultural industry. I forewarn the Minister that I will not attack him personally. I hope that during the debate I shall be able to advise him a little, from my farming experience, on the mistakes that his party and his Government have made over the last 12 years. It is to be hoped that the introduction of our 10-point policy, which I trust that the Minister has read, will enable us to go forward and improve the nation's agricultural industry.

I have had the pleasure of representing a rural constituency in west Wales for the last 17 years. The majority of my constituents are self-employed farmers, many of them on small family farms. I hope to have the pleasure of continuing to do what I can to help them for many years to come.

Never during the past 50 years has the future looked so bleak for British farming, an industry which has rightly prided itself on its efficiency. It is sufering from a crushing loss of confidence that has driven, and is continuing to drive, many farmers from the land. Over 6,000 workers, 4,000 of them full-time, left the land last year. How many more will leave the land this and next year? Let us hope that something can be done in the short term to stop the decline.

Unfortunately, farmers' debt amounted last year to £7 billion, compared with £3 billion at the beginning of the 1980s. Interest alone is now costing the industry £1 billion annually. The high interest rates that have prevailed for the last couple of years have caused increasing problems to an already overstretched industry. The reduction

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announced yesterday has come too late for many and is too little to save many hundreds of others from financial ruin in the next few months.

Let us make no mistake about the fact that all farmers are suffering in the current situation, including the large farmers of East Anglia, the dairy farmers of Devon and the south of England and the hill farmers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But those who stand to lose the most are the smaller family farmers, of whom there are many in every part of Britain.

When I refer to family farms, I am speaking of farms that are looked after by the husband and wife and perhaps son and daughter, all earning a living from their parcel of land. It is important to do all that we can to preserve that type of farming, of whose record we should be proud. The livestock producers, the descendants of farmers who toiled on upland farms in the less-favoured areas over the centuries, have helped to weave the fabric of rural Britain, of which we are proud.

Some may ask why, in a time of recession, agriculture should be picked out for special treatment. We Liberal Democrats believe that agriculture has a vital role to play in the United Kingdom economy and in maintaining the structure of rural Britain. It deserves support as an efficient industry which has increased production, until today we are 75 per cent. self-sufficient in food. We must maintain a thriving agriculture so that we can carry on producing high-quality, reasonably priced food for the consumer. We also need the farmer as the guardian of the countryside, a responsibility which he has successfully carried out since time immemorial.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, faced with the present crisis, we in rural Wales are concerned not just with agriculture directly but with the whole of the rural economy? Village life depends on the farms that are under threat. If farming goes, the whole infrastructure of large areas will disappear.

Mr. Howells: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman, who represents a constituency similar to mine and encounters problems similar to those that I encounter. I am sure that the Government will take heed. We need the farmer as the guardian of our countryside—a responsibility which, as I have said, he has successfully carried out since time immemorial.

Last, but not least, we recognise that if our rural communities are to survive, the farmer, his or her family and related industries and services must be encouraged to stay in the countryside. That may be difficult at times, but we have to do our best. A Conservative Member shakes his head. I wonder whether he is against such a policy.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Does my hon. Friend agree that the crofters and farmers of the islands, particularly the Scottish islands, contribute to the local community and are very valuable to the countryside? The agricultural development programme that was instituted for the islands was very welcome, but people now find that they are unable to keep up their payments, and we shall have to seek an extension. Many of these people are too proud to ask for help. This is the sort of thing that makes life very difficult for the farmers of the islands.

Mr. Howells: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, who cares so deeply about her people in Scotland. As I have told her many times, I refer to her as "Miss Scotland". I hope that the Secretary of State will take note of what she has just said. We need the part-time farmers and crofters in many parts of Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that she is proud to be called "Miss Scotland"—if only because of the record of her father, who played so often for Scotland.

We must not leave the industry at the mercy of naked market forces, as the Government seem intent on doing. They are willing to allow free market forces to take over completely, and quite content to allow the structures that have been developed since the second world war to encourage British farming to wither away.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): My hon. Friend has just mentioned the Government's willingness to allow market forces to run riot. I know that he is aware that the Government seem willing to allow that in relation to agricultural tenancies, too. Does he agree that the policy that the Government have offered in their recent consultation paper—that agricultural holdings should be subject only to negotiation in the free market—is unrealistic? Bearing in mind the inequality of bargaining power between a young applicant for a tenancy and an experienced land agent, does he agree that a free market in tenancies is likely to wreck the strength of the agricultural rented sector? [HON. MEMBERS: "Speech."] Does my hon. Friend agree that the only way to ensure that there is a reasonable supply of farm tenancies is to give fiscal incentives to both landlords and tenants?

Mr. Howells: That is my hon. Friend's speech done. As a poor hill farmer, I must listen to my colleagues at length. I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend will advise the Government. If my memory serves me well, he has until 31 March to express his views. I am sure that he has already drafted something and that it is on the way to the Minister. The point that he has just made is very valid and constructive.

Our parents and grandparents saw unfettered market forces in action in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time there was even greater desertion of the land. Rural communities were dispersed, and the production and distribution of food were inefficient and inadequate.

During their 12 years in office, the Government have signally failed to provide the necessary encouragement for an industry which surely deserves better. Therefore, they are failing not only the farmers, but the consumers and rural community of which farmers form the backbone.

I shall give a little bit of advice and a little history lesson to the Minister. I do not think that he was here in 1973 —*[Interruption.]* He indicates that he was here then. Just to remind him—the Tory Government of 1973 decided to do away with the deficiency system for beef cattle. Within 12 months, the beef industry had hit rock bottom, calves were left at the market throughout the country and could not be sold. We could not sell our beef cattle.

In 1974, I was elected to the House. I am sure that the Minister will agree that the late Fred Peart made a wonderful job of saving the beef industry in that year. It was a lesson for every one of us, and makes me wonder whether the agricultural industry of Britain will survive in a free market economy without safeguards for the produce of this country.

I listened to the Minister with interest at the annual meeting——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): He spoke well.

Mr. Howells: He spoke quite well, but he made a point about the future of the milk marketing boards about which I am a little worried and perturbed. I remember the days before the war when we had a free market economy. During the past 50 years, the forefathers of hon. Members on both sides of the House have fought hard to establish the milk marketing boards. It all started in Cardiganshire in west Wales in the early 1930s. During the past 50 years, the boards have served producers well and dairy farmers are still farming in every part of Britain.

I do not think that the Minister was responsible although I may be wrong, when the Government decided in 1988 to do away with the guaranteed price for wool. This year, the farmers will be paid that guaranteed price of between £1·15 and £1·25 per kilo, but next year they will not have the guaranteed price, and our sheep and wool producers will lose about £30 million next year because the Government have done away with the financial agreement.

The decision was taken unilaterally and had nothing to do with the European Community. It was a Government decision and a big mistake. On behalf of the sheep producers of this country, I say—I am sure that hon. Members will agree—that we should bring pressure to bear on the Government to reintroduce that financial agreement for another five-year period until we are out of our present crisis. If the will is there—I hope it is—that can be done.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says about the critical position facing family farms throughout the United Kingdom. To go back to his history lesson, do farmers in Ceredigion and Pembroke, North agree with the view expressed to me by many farmers in Scotland, that agriculture always does better under a Labour Government? Would he like to speculate on why so many of them persist in voting Conservative?

Mr. Howells: I will not follow that line, but I will say that most farmers in Britain will vote for us next time, because we have a good policy to help them out of this crisis.

The Government made a big mistake in the early 1980s when they persuaded our farmers to expand, to spend more, to invest more and to produce more. That continued for four or five years. I respect the Minister's views, but now, five years later, he is trying to persuade farmers to produce less. I honestly believe that the Tory party has misled and mismanaged agriculture during the past 12 years——

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Going back to an earlier passage in the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the milk marketing board, is the House to understand that he is advocating the retention of the board with no change in it? If so, can he explain how he reconciles that with the requirements of the European Community, which I believe his party supports?

Mr. Howells: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know from speaking to dairy farmers in his constituency —I spoke to many of them at their annual general meeting this week—that more than 90 per cent. of them favour holding on to the milk marketing board with its present statutory powers. That is food for thought for the Minister. Given the will to do so, he may be able to persuade his counterparts in Europe to keep the present system.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I respect the hon. Gentleman's views on these matters, but I wonder whether he will help me. At present, 35 per cent. of the milk sold in this country is of the skimmed or semi-skimmed variety, which does not come under the present marketing arrangements. There is also the problem that the movement towards standardised milk will have serious effects on those arrangements; and there is the further problem that this country has so far not been able to produce the quality of product at the top end of the market, so, even though we are less than fully supplied with milk, we are producing milk for intervention products such as butter.

All three aspects mean that, as the milk marketing board has itself said, the board should start thinking of moving towards a voluntary co-operative. How does the hon. Gentleman reconcile that with his views that somehow we can stay exactly as we are?

Mr. Howells: I advised the Minister a few minutes ago that the Government made a big mistake with one of our statutory boards—the British Wool Marketing Board—in 1988. He should not make a similar mistake in 1992. We have learnt the lesson the hard way, so I hope that the Minister will not let our dairy farmers down after 50 years of stability.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): Does my hon. Friend agree that the future of the milk marketing board is under threat from the views of the Dairy Trade Federation, and that it is having to bend to the federation's views? Other Ministers have protected the milk marketing board's position in the past and this Minister is duty bound to do the same now.

Mr. Howells: My hon. Friend's views are always sound; but I must add that I shall not give way any more today.

One of the problems is that there has been no consistent agriculture policy; instead, there have been sudden switches of tactics which cannot entirely be blamed on the Government. In the early 1980s, the cry was for increased production—and as fast as possible. Farmers were urged to invest in equipment and buildings, and then suddenly there were cuts and quotas. Little wonder, then, that agriculture has been so unnerved. From one year to the next, farmers have to change their plans and have little opportunity to form long-term strategies or to invest sensibly. They must be given the chance to plan ahead.

The Minister is right to criticise the current MacSharry proposals, but he is wrong to lay the blame for all the industry's ills at the door of the common agricultural policy. The Minister has so few positive proposals that we wish to make some constructive suggestions of our own. The industry would benefit from a 10-year strategy aimed at assisting farmers during transition. It would encourage them not to resist inevitable changes and would ensure that they compete on equal terms with other European farmers.

We have a 10-point plan and some of the points are especially relevant. First, we have said that resources must

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be switched from supporting over-production to direct support for farm incomes, and that payments must be specially targeted on medium and small family farms. Secondly, as agriculture underpins the social fabric of rural Britain, it follows that direct support must concentrate on social as well as environmental objectives. Thirdly, the future of the European family farm should not be sacrificed in any attempt to bring the GATT negotiations to a conclusion. If a reduction in some support for agriculture can be justified, it must be gradual and sensibly phased.

We say that less-favoured areas and environmentally sensitive areas should be extended, and the system used to sustain local farming communities and to encourage environmentally friendly farming and the preservation of the countryside. In case some Conservative Members think that this attack on the Government is only by Liberal Democrats, let us hear the view of the National Farmers Union. I am delighted to see that the new president of the NFU, David Naish, is here listening to the debate. I wish him well in his new office and thank the ex-president, Sir Simon Gourlay, for the services that he rendered to British agriculture.

According to the NFU the MacSharry proposals strongly discriminate against British farmers. The NFU states:

"Although rebuffed on first outing by Council of Ministers, these proposals are likely to come back in some form in some very tough EC price proposals due to be announced soon".

The NFU says that the

"Minister be left in no doubt that he must not come back from Brussels without having removed the discriminatory aspects of the package."

It says that the cut in interest rates is welcome, but that there is a pressing need for the Government to go further, and soon. It states:

"Unless urgent action taken soon we shall see the demise of the small family farmer in British agriculture, together with his role in the rural community and management of the countryside."

The Farmers Union of Wales states that it

"recognises the threat to Welsh agriculture of a revised CAP favouring the 'Allotment' farmers of Europe".

The Minister understands that quotation. The FUW continues:

"however it is undeniable that 80 per cent. of EEC support goes to 20 per cent. of farmers—and that 60 per cent. of farm support does not get through to the farming community"—

that is most important—

"Preliminary estimates suggest that this waste—the proportion of consumer and taxpayer expenditure on current farm support which does not get through to farmers—is about 60 per cent. on average. While public dissatisfaction with the growth in this spending is almost all directed to agriculture only some 40 per cent. is actually benefiting farmers."

We are concerned that the Government are presiding over a gradual decline in agriculture. It has been starved of support and resources and, as a result, it is fighting for its future. I fear that it may already be too late to reverse that trend. Time is not on our side. We face the consequences of further cuts in support, the open market of 1992, and greater access to the European market by iron curtain countries. Urgent and effective action is needed to ensure that farming survives as an effective force. We hope that this debate will make a turning point in public and Government perception of a once great industry, which came to the country's rescue in two world wars.

In the last century, a prominent Englishman, George Borrow, travelled through Wales, from north to south—and his book, in which he describes his experiences, is very interesting. When he came to my area of mid-Wales, he wrote:

"This is an area where crows will die and men will live."

I hope that the day will never come when only crows will live in mid-Wales, and there will be no men there to farm the hills and uplands.

4.40 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes Her Majesty's Government's intention to negotiate in Brussels so as to secure changes to the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community which make it more market-oriented, thereby giving an incentive to efficiency, reduce surpluses, thereby lessening tensions in international trade, keeping spending within the agricultural guideline, avoid discrimination against United Kingdom interests, and integrate environmental considerations more firmly into the Policy; and recognises that such a stance is necessary to take proper account of the interests of taxpayers and consumers while offering a realistic prospect of a successful future for British farming.".

I thank the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) for the courteous way in which he moved his motion, and for reminding the House that he and I have, on a number of occasions, fought side by side when we have found ourselves at odds with the majority of the Opposition—not least, when the hon. Gentleman bravely supported the Government's efforts to back the safety of British beef, when it was so deeply undermined by the official Opposition. If I am critical of the views held by the hon. Gentleman's party, I hope that he will not take my remarks personally.

The hon. Gentleman described, quite rightly, the serious position of agriculture throughout the European Community and emphasised the problems of the United Kingdom in general—and of the Principality and his own constituency in particular. However, perhaps it would have been more sensible for the hon. Gentleman to begin by admitting that, as more than 80 per cent. of spending on agriculture comes from decisions made in Brussels, the nature, future and activity of the common agricultural policy is central to what happens. If one examines only that amount being spent by the British Government, one sees that the figure has risen constantly. The argument that agriculture is starved of funds comes oddly from the hon. Gentleman, who knows that only this week I announced another £17·5 million for the poorest farmers in the most difficult areas—many of them in the hon. Gentleman's own constituency.

Although we share the hon. Gentleman's concern—and I hope that no one doubts my personal commitment to the role of the farmer as the custodian of the countryside, as well as a producer of food, and belief that it would be wrong to take the present period of plenty as necessarily the pattern for the future, and therefore that it is absolutely necessary to maintain our ability to produce food at home and to have farmers and farm land available for that purpose—the hon. Gentleman did not seem

prepared to face up to the real choices and problems that confront us. He prefers merely to state the problem, without proposing any solution.

I invite the House to examine the motion carefully. It states that the Liberal Democratic party

"regrets proposed changes in the Common Agricultural Policy".

I am glad that the Liberal Democrats are not representing this country, if all that they could say to Mr. MacSharry is, "We regret what you are doing." If that had been done, Mr. MacSharry would be doing it still. There would have been no possibility of getting the group of nations and strength of feeling behind the United Kingdom that we did, if all we had said about Mr. MacSharry's proposals was that we regretted them. To regret would have been to allow to pass.

We start by saying that we oppose Mr. MacSharry's proposals. We hate them. We condemn them. We do so in the terms expressed in a letter to *The Times* from the editor of a farm newspaper. He needed to write to *The Times* because that newspaper is not always clear about the needs of British farming. That correspondent asked why is it acceptable to put the farmer in Dyfed—perhaps the farmer in Ceredigion and Pembroke, North—out of business because he has 50 cows, but to keep the farmer in Sligo in business because he has 40 cows. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North must accept that the MacSharry proposals are extremely damaging to European farming generally, and especially damaging to British farming—and to Welsh farming in particular.

Mr. Geraint Howells: The right hon. Gentleman could not have been listening, because I said that I supported him for opposing the MacSharry proposals—but that whether it be in six months' or 12 months' time, Mr. MacSharry's proposals will have to be accepted by the British Government, even though I hope that they can be amended.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No!

Mr. Howells: The hon. Lady can shout as much as she likes, but if the Minister is not in favour of the MacSharry principle, or of the amended version within the next two years, I am certain that he will not have an alternative policy. Perhaps the Minister will say what are his alternative policies.

Mr. Gummer: I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will make it clear in agricultural constituencies throughout the country that it is the Liberal Democrats' official policy to accept the inevitability of Mr. MacSharry's proposals. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] I base that not only on the hon. Gentleman's remarks but on the Liberal Democrats' proposals in the document "A Thriving Countryside", which I read most carefully. It is a better document than that which I had cause to discuss with the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), which promoted, among other things, a national statutory pig-weaning period. Such was the nature of the proposals that we once received from the Social Democrats.

Those who carefully record the signatories to Opposition motions will have noted that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is not a signatory to today's motion. I suspect that is because he, and others who have not put their names to the motion know of the deep division among Liberal Democrats between those in the countryside, who want to appear that they are in favour of a continuation of the present system, and those in the towns, who want to suggest to the taxpayers that there are great sums of money to be saved.

I am not in favour of the proposition that one can have a free market in agricultural products. How can one use that argument when, in the first place, the market would not be free? The United States is a major supporter of its agricultural producers. Japan, the world's other large exporter and a major proponent of better trade, is not prepared to do anything about the fact that it is an even bigger supporter of its agricultural producers than we in the European community. It would be entirely wrong to suggest that anyone is proposing a free market. What Conservative Members are saying is that, if our farmers are to be given a chance to compete, blocks must not be placed in their way.

Let me take head on, as it were, the point raised by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North about the Milk Marketing Board. I remind the House that he said neither that he was in favour of its reform nor that he was against it. That position is reflected in the answers given by Liberal Democrats from platforms all over the country: when it is convenient, they will say that they are in favour, and when it is inconvenient they will say the opposite.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. I wish to finish what I have to say: it is of crucial importance.

Who has suggested the reform of the Milk Marketing Board? The board itself. Why? Because it believes that, to defend the producer's interest, it must face the present reality. I am all for a history lesson, but I know of no other industry that would consider it sensible to argue that what was good 60 years ago must inevitably be good now. Such a proposition demands a certain amount of questioning. After all, 60 years ago we had a closed milk market: people were not importing milk or milk products to any significant extent, and if they had we could have stopped them. Today, we have a free market, and we must ask ourselves, "Can the British producer expect a fair deal within the present structure?"

The Milk Marketing Board has said that it fears that that will not be possible. For several years, the British milk producer has received less for his milk than any other producer in the European Community, while the consumer has paid more for her milk than any other consumer in the Community. Ideal though it was in earlier circumstances, the Milk Marketing Board must be changed to suit the consumer.

Let me make a commitment to the hon. Gentleman. My concern is to ensure that the producer can obtain a fair return for his work, and I do not believe that the present system will enable him to compete effectively with those whose products will enter this country in the Common Market of 1992. The reason is clear. Three of the food-producing companies that have performed best over the past 10 years are producers of yoghurt; they are based in France, and are selling high value-added products on our market. I do not mind that—indeed, I am in favour of it—but I know of no similar British companies that are selling similar products on the French market, gaining for the British producer the margin that I wish him to have. I

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want a system that will return to the industry the innovation that it has lost, and only a reform of the Milk Marketing Board will make that possible.

Mr. Geraint Howells: There is only one way to find out who is right and who is wrong. Will the Minister give the country's dairy producers an assurance that he will hold a referendum to establish what percentage of those dairy farmers are in favour of retaining the Milk Marketing Board with its present statutory powers?

Mr. Gummer: I can give a better assurance than that. I have told representatives of the industry that I want them to present their own propositions for their Milk Marketing Board, and I am now waiting for their answer.

Whatever happens, I have a duty to protect the ability of British milk producers to compete with others. It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to comment, but no one will remember that he has said what he has said. Everyone will remember if I turn out to be the Minister of Agriculture who fails the country's milk producers. I am not going to do that, because I am committed to them, and that means that I must tell them plainly that 34 per cent. of today's liquid milk sales are outwith the scheme.

We cannot view the scheme as unchangeable, when the whole question of standardised milk is becoming central to the discussions in the Community. We cannot discuss the scheme as it is now without taking into account the terms under which the Community originally accepted it, and the dangers that it now holds as our liquid milk consumption falls. It is bilking the issue to cast general aspersions, and not to accept the Milk Marketing Board's own statement that it may well need to change if it is to do its job for the producer.

The hon. Gentleman bilks the issue in another respect. Having listened to the question asked by his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), he remarked how valuable his hon. and learned Friend was, as a lawyer, and assured him that he would take heed of his requests relating to agricultural tenancies. Who has asked us to change the law on agricultural tenancies? It was not the landowners but, primarily, the young farmers, who said that they needed a change if they were to have an opportunity of acquiring tenancies. It is a curious Liberal approach to suggest that I should be condemned for issuing a public consultation document seeking to persuade the industry to face the realities.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, who has now left us, said that he wanted us to continue statutory controls on tenancies. Perhaps the industry proposes such an arrangement in one way or another—and this is a consultation document—but I must ask whether a sensible tenancy system can be achieved if the system is cast in a way that encourages people to get around it with fake arrangements for share farming and special deals, all of them on a very short-term basis and most putting far more power into the hands of the landlords than the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery suggested would result from the kind of open system that is proposed in the consultation document.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who has been waiting for a long time.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Is not the point at issue in regard to both tenancies and the Milk Marketing Board our belief, as a party, in a demand-led rather than a command-led economy? The agricultural position in both western and eastern Europe shows where a command-led economy has taken us. The only apparent difference is that, whereas in the west the command economy has led to surpluses, in the east it has led to deficiencies. To that extent we are better off, but many of the problems affecting our agricultural system are caused by the fact that it is commanded by the state and by politicians, rather than being exposed to market forces.

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, but I suggest that there is another connection between the two issues. In both cases the Liberal Democrats will say whatever suits their audience at the time. When it comes to discussing tenancies, they will do what they have been doing in every agricultural constituency in the country: they will say to those they think would like to have tenancies, "Yes, of course we want reform." They will say to those they think would not like the new tenancies, "We oppose them." Opposition Members do not want to intervene because that is an incontrovertible statement. The Liberal Democrats have 650 separate policies, one for each constituency. Those policies break up by ward when it comes to local government elections.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I must continue with my speech, in view of what Mr. Speaker said.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the right hon. Gentleman please give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I must continue.

Mr. Foulkes: The right hon. Gentleman ought to give way, because no Labour Member of Parliament has been allowed to intervene.

Mr. Gummer: We are debating the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North and I want to complete my reply to him.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I have already said that I do not intend to give way.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The Minister has made it clear that he does not intend to give way.

Mr. Gummer: I realise that some Labour Members of Parliament wish to speak in the debate, and I look forward to their contributions. I want the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) to explain to British farmers why the Labour party supports Mr. MacSharry's policies. On 24 January the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) asked:

"Has the Minister noticed the uncanny resemblance between the recently leaked proposals from the Commission

for the reform of the CAP . . . and of the Labour party, which are . . . virtually indistinguishable from those proposals?"—*Official Report*, 24 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. 449.]

I look forward to hearing how the Labour party intends to explain to British farmers why 99 per cent. of the cuts in the sheep market should affect the United Kingdom while the rest of the Community will suffer only a 1 per cent. cut.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Even someone as thick-skinned as I is well aware of the fact that the Minister does not intend to give way. The hon. Gentleman must therefore resume his seat. The Minister has made his position quite clear.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: We are debating a Liberal Democrat motion. I want, therefore, to refer to the motion that is before the House.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have never known a debate, albeit on the motion of a minority party, in which an Official Opposition Member of Parliament has not been allowed to intervene during a ministerial speech. The Official Opposition represents 220 constituencies. I represent a rural constituency.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me. If the Minister is allowed to make progress, I am sure that I shall be able to call other Opposition Members.

Mr. Gummer: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is worth pointing out that more Members of the Liberal Democrat party are in the Chamber at the moment than Members of the official Opposition—a fact which may be commented upon in many constituencies.

The positive part of the motion restates my words to the National Farmers Union the day before yesterday. That part of it which deals with the environment is largely a straight crib from Conservative Government policies, so I do not need to argue against them. I know that the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North agrees, because he did not refer to that in his speech. He knows that we agree with many of his proposals, although not all.

I do not agree with the suggestion that we should look after the countryside according to the diktat of local authority committees. I am not sure that farmers would want to manage their land according to the diktat of the chairman of the planning committee of Ceredigion district council. I suspect that farmers would prefer to have greater control over the future of the countryside which they created and which they manage.

I must refer to the desperate danger that is implicit in the last sentence of the hon. Gentleman's motion, which reads:

"and by reformed systems of direct support targeted in particular on family farms."

If we were to suggest that some farms in Britain are family farms and that other unspecified farms are not, we should be saying to Mr. MacSharry, "Your policies are absolutely right." Almost every farm in Britain is a family farm. Some family farms consist of husband and wife, son and daughter working one farm together. Others consist of father and son working two separate farms. On some farms, cousins, aunts and others play their part in running a family farm.

The danger with the MacSharry proposal is that a family farm with mother, father and three sons fully active is less of a family farm than one which is divided among four different families. I know that the hon. Gentleman does not mean that, but if he suggests that there is such a distinction, his words will be used by our European Community foes in our negotiations on these matters.

The document "A Thriving Countryside"—rather ominously referred to as Federal Green Paper No. 18—refers constantly to small farms. If that were taken to mean that farms in Dyfed would receive special, uncovenanted extra support, the hon. Gentleman would be misleading the public. In Britain, there are no small farms, by European standards. There may be sufficient small farms to count as one vote for each Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament, but that is about all. For his own electoral good, the hon. Gentleman ought to realise that he should never refer to small farms when dealing with agricultural matters, since the European Community might remind him that 90 per cent. of the farms in Portugal consist of less than 5 hectares and that in Italy the average farm is a holding of 14 acres.

Mr. Geraint Howells: What is wrong with that?

Mr. Gummer: If aid is directed to those small farms, there will be none left for the farmers in Dyfed. If he wants resources to be transferred from this country to Portugal, Italy, Greece and Ireland, he should tell the electors of Ceredigion. No one in Ceredigion would support him. In those circumstances, he ought to stand for election in Portugal, Italy, Greece or Ireland.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: I must not give way to my hon. Friend, or the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) will feel justifiably hurt.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North and I agree that the common agricultural policy needs to be fundamentally reformed. Environmental support must be the driving force if we are to ensure that our agricultural industry is provided with a firm foundation for the future. We must ensure that British farmers are able to look after their land and produce food. We agree about those issues. However, it does the hon. Gentleman no good to pretend that that can be achieved by any British Government on their own. It has to be achieved within the European Community, of which we are a member. His party rightly supports our membership.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman.

It is not right for the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North to pretend to the farming population that there is a tenable small farms European Community policy that will not result in the devastation of British agriculture. Any party that makes such a proposal does so for electoral reasons that will be found to be dishonourable.

I shall conclude by repeating the points that I made in my speech to the National Farmers Union about how to change the common agricultural policy to enable it to deal with a time of surplus as it was able to deal with a time of

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shortage. First, we must change it to bring the farmer closer to the market, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North agrees, but at a pace and speed that farmers can accept. That is necessary and we know that. No amount of enthusiasm for the interests of consumers can hide the fact that they would be a great deal worse off if they could not go into a countryside cared for by farmers or buy food produced by British producers.

Secondly, we must ensure that there is a better way to help farmers to care for the countryside——

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): But the Minister has not told us how he is going to do it.

Mr. Gummer: I shall send the hon. Gentleman a copy of my speech which describes in great detail how we should proceed. We must convince the Community.

We are the European leaders in environmental improvement and our environmentally sensitive areas policy has now been copied by France, Germany and Denmark. Our nitrate-sensitive areas policy is now seen as a model for the rest of Europe. Our countryside premium is a successful pilot scheme in the east of England and I hope that it will be the basis for extension elsewhere. We are proposing environmentally satisfactory set-aside with a different structure which would enable us to improve farming incomes and, at the same time, to provide better land protection, preservation and conservation. As we are the leaders, I suggest that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) reads my speech which sets out in detail and clearly the environmental direction that we hope that the European Community will take.

There is no way in which we can achieve that unless we can defeat the MacSharry plan and replace it with the sensible common agricultural policy that we want. I beg the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North not to say the type of things that may sound all right on the hustings in British constituencies, but which would enable the Community to make changes that would destroy the livelihoods of the people whose votes he seeks to attract.

Mr Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Intellectual vacuity.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) is good at making sedentary comments. He has not stood up to try to intervene. He may comment on the intellectual content of my speech, but I remind him that he is the creator of the compulsory pig-weaning system. He suggested that we have pig police to check that pigs are not weaned earlier than they should be. He did not realise that pigs farrow sequentially and that if they farrow at midnight, the ones born later would have an extra day before they were weaned. That is the intellectual base of his agricultural knowledge, so it is not surprising that he addresses the House from a seated position. If he were to stand up, he would be knocked down. The hon. Gentleman must not help us in that way.

The motion is a means by which the Liberal Democrats seek to hide the fact that they have no alternative policy and it uses language that they hope will win one or two votes. In case anybody believes it, I shall quote some facts at random. These are the figures for the north-western region, which includes Lancashire and the dales. I hope that the Liberal Democrats will explain to people there that there are 7,937 active milk producers, 58 per cent. of whom would suffer cuts of 10 per cent. in their quotas if the MacSharry proposals were accepted. By talking about small farmers, the Liberal Democrats are determined to undermine the Government's intention to fight the proposals. That fact should be known by every farmer not only in Ceredigion and in Brecon and Radnor, but in the Lancashire dales in case they have an opportunity to ensure that that party is no longer represented in this House.

5.14 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) on his able speech. I have a great deal of respect for his experience and I enjoyed listening to what he said on behalf of his constituents and farmers in general.

The Labour party recognises the pressures that farmers are facing in the present circumstances. This year is perhaps one of their worst for a long time. Their problems are not all caused by the European Community, as has been mentioned, but, so far it has not been mentioned that one of the worst pressures facing farmers is crippling interest rates and the Government's general mismanagement of the economy. Like other businesses and industries, large or small, farmers are hurt by the economic climate.

The Opposition wish to make it clear that we agree with the Government that the CAP must be reformed urgently. There must be movement towards the general agreement on tariffs and trade with other countries. It is intolerable that subsidised food surpluses from the European Community are dumped on to the world market and then hinder other countries, especially developing countries and third-world countries, in developing their own agricultural industries. In many cases those industries are the only ones that they have to sustain their economies.

Following the Minister's comments, I wish to put it on record that the Opposition accept that the MacSharry proposals discriminate against the United Kingdom in particular. The Minister was unfair to my hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South-West (Mr. Jones) who referred to the "future harvests" proposals of the Council for the Protection of Rural England and said that the MacSharry proposals on the environment—not all his proposals—were in line with Labour party proposals. At that time, the MacSharry proposals had not been made public.

Mr. Gummer: I know that the hon. Gentleman has not had time to refresh his memory. The question asked by his hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South-West (Mr. Jones) referred clearly to the impact of agriculture on the environment. However, in his supplementary question he asked:

"Is he aware also of the policies of the National Consumer Council and of the Labour party, which are also virtually indistinguishable from those proposals?"—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. 449.]

He meant the proposals of the Commission, which refer not to the environment but to the proposals for reform of the CAP. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) must accept that his hon. Friend said that the Labour party favoured the MacSharry proposals.

Mr. Morley: I am giving the official Labour party line on the proposals, which is on record as opposed. To clear up the matter, I shall quote my hon. Friend's full supplementary question. He asked:

"Has the Minister noticed the uncanny resemblance between the recently leaked proposals from the Commission for the reform of the CAP and CPRE's excellent document. 'Future harvests'? Is he aware also of the policies of the National Consumer Council and of the Labour party, which are also virtually indistinguishable from those proposals? Will he now change his approach to the problem?"—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. 449.]

By any standard, that is not an endorsement of the MacSharry proposals.

We recognise that the MacSharry proposals would increase the cost of the CAP. That in itself is a cause for concern, given its enormous cost to the taxpayer and to the consumer. In all fairness, Mr. MacSharry was trying to tackle the problem of the CAP. His proposals will discriminate against many British farmers and may fall disproportionately heavily on the United Kingdom, but he was making a genuine attempt to do something about the CAP. He does not deserve the abuse that he has received, especially from the Minister, for his proposals. Some of his arguments in defence of small farms are not unreasonable, either here or abroad.

Many members of the farming community are concerned about the Minister's attitude. Let me quote the opinion of *The Scottish Farmer:*

"Mr. Gummer, on the other hand, is unequivocal . . . Small farms should be helped to restructure, he said. If that was not possible, they should be prepared to move out. And that cannot be a warning just for the so-called inefficient farmers across the Channel. It must also be of great concern to many farmers on this side, highly dependent on EEC and government support, which is undoubtedly set for continued decline."

That is not my opinion but the opinion of the farming press, expressed in a newspaper which I imagine speaks for a great many farmers and their concerns.

Mr. Gummer: Let me make this clear. I said that, in EC terms, there were no small farms in this country. Many small farms in the British sense—family farms—are economically viable and, if the Community were properly organised, would be perfectly capable of producing an adequate income for their owners and workers. On the continent, however, many farms are so small that in no sense can they produce an adequate income. Surely one can make the distinction between sensibly sized farms and the farms to which some have referred as allotments. Even such an eminent source as *The Scottish Farmer* must see that that distinction is clear. We need restructuring where farms are so tiny that they cannot be sensibly worked. Britain has already undertaken such restructuring and I do not see why we should pay for other countries to do the same.

Mr. Morley: I do not disagree that some farms on the continent are so small that their viability is called into question, but we should also bear in mind the fact that many European farms are better for the environment because they have not been amalgamated in the damaging way in which many farms in this country have been amalgamated over the years.

Small farms may be economically inefficient, but we are talking about supporting people on the land. The EC spends £24 billion on the common agricultural policy, the bulk of which goes on the storage and disposal of surpluses. If the EC can do that, I see no reason why it should not have a coherent policy to support small communities and small farms and to keep people on the land by providing them with income and helping them to protect the environment in desirable ways.

I would point out to the Minister that certain areas and practices are extremely important in ecological terms. I cite the traditional grazing practices used in Spain, and the cork forests. If we are to spend money on the CAP anyway, I would rather see my money and my taxes being spent on supporting small communities and on protecting the environment than on the disposal of food mountains.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is not my hon. Friend saying something slightly different? Is he not suggesting that we need rules to allow us to abandon the rubbish of the CAP, which is destroying agriculture, and to look for alternative ways of directly affecting the environment? That will not happen if we support the MacSharry proposals.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes a helpful suggestion, very much in line with the Labour party's green premium, which would direct support to farmers in ways beneficial not only to communities but to the environment generally.

We have talked about the move towards larger farms. I listened carefully to the Minister's speech at the National Farmers Union annual general meeting and there was much in it with which I would not necessarily disagree. Having said that, I believe that he placed too much emphasis on the need for larger farm units, although perhaps I misinterpreted his remarks. I do not believe that the amalgamation of small farms into larger farms is necessarily the best way forward for British farming. It deprives many young people of the opportunity to go into farming, and concentrates power in the hands of a few people. I do not see anything particularly efficient about one large farmer receiving lots of subsidies as opposed to more small units receiving a share of the support.

The Minister also appears to view in black and white the environmental impact of small and large farms. There are good and bad farms in both categories.

There are some very well run large farms but in many cases, larger amalgamated units have uprooted hedgerows and chopped down woods to get ever larger machinery on to the land. I am not sure that we should want to pursue that route. In the end, circumstances may arise in which even the farms that are large and efficient by present standards may not be able to compete and they will still need a measure of support. I refer to the uncertain future in farming, to the likely move towards world prices and to the unknown impact on farming of the developments in eastern Europe. I do not disagree with the Minister that the move towards world prices and towards greater freedom in terms of produce ought to be gradual.

Many farmers in the less-favoured areas and uplands do not seem to fit the Minister's criteria for the future of farming. I think that there is room for traditional small farms, and I disagree with the Minister that there are no small farms in the United Kingdom. Has he not heard of crofts? Do not they fit into his analysis of small farms? In my view, crofts deserve some support.

A balance should be struck between the need for efficiency and for larger units and an international free market for their produce to allow a fair share for

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third-world and developing countries. We need to give financial support and to provide a safety net and to improve our environment through the continuation of policies that we have supported, such as environmentally sensitive areas, and policies that we advocate, such as the green premium. We need to build upon those achievements. We need to look at the use of set-aside, and I welcome the enhancement of set-aside payments to allow its use for conservation purposes. That is a great step forward in a policy about which I have grave reservations none the less.

We need far more research and development of alternative crops and farmland uses. I was interested to read Sir Derek Barber's comments about the use of farmland that is suitable for the growing of phragmites to clean up sewage and dirty water. It is an exciting and radical proposal. I have read scientific papers on the use of phragmites in wetlands. It is one way of recycling and of cleaning up emissions. It is useful and enhances the environment.

I was disappointed in the Minister's comments to the NFU about biomass experiments, even though I accept that they may not be especially economic at present. I have seen them in Sweden and I have seen the experiments that are being funded in Northern Ireland, and I would not rule out such a radical approach to the provision of alternative crops and farmland uses.

At a time like this, farmers need to be encouraged and supported by the Government. I took the Minister's comments that he was not advocating a free market approach but that was not the impression I had from his speech and his undue emphasis on larger units. A balance must be struck if we are to move towards orderly change and the reform of the CAP. The Government must face up to their responsibilities for research and development, structural support and environmental policy. Above all, they must give some thought to their disastrous economic policy which has been responsible for pushing so many farmers, who were already teetering on the edge, over the brink. The responsibility lies with the Government. I accept that these days much farm policy is directed by the EC but it is in the Government's hands to change and improve the economic policies under which farmers operate, and they should give some serious thought to that.

5.29 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): It would be wrong to say that farming was not in difficulties at present, because there is no doubt that, like many other businesses, it is. But many factors other than Government policy affect the future and the success of farming. After all, farming is a cyclical business. For example, recently the great difficulty of the snow has made the job of the farmer a great deal harder. Before that, last summer, there was a serious drought in this country. It is all too easy for Members of Parliament, working in the environment here, to forget about that. The drought had a serious effect on the livestock farmers in my constituency.

The amount of fodder that farmers could produce last summer was greatly reduced because the lack of rain meant that the grass did not grow. By the middle of October, a great deal of the fodder for feeding dairy cows had been used up. I have a friend in the forest of Dean who has over 100 milking cows and is having to spend £1,000 a month on concentrates to feed his cows and keep the milk flowing. Of course, that is having a dire effect on the profitability of his enterprise, as, indeed, is the tremendous drop in the price of calves. In the year 1989-90, my friend was receiving £155 per calf. In 1991 that price has fallen to £45. That again has a tremendous impact on the man's profitability. Along with static cereal prices, levies and stabilisers, that has a serious effect on the income of all farmers.

But things would be much worse if Mr. MacSharry had his way. I make no apology for returning to some of his proposals. First, the proposals would increase the cost of the common agricultural policy, rather than reduce it. They would do nothing for the environment. They make no mention whatever of consumers or the farmers' customers. The proposals would make European agriculture non-competitive and non-innovative. The farmer will be told that, if he has a small dairy herd or a few beef cattle now, he will be supported to continue to farm in that way for the rest of his life. Of course, some small farmers in Europe would very much welcome such a proposal.

Opposition Members may be interested to know that 80 per cent. of the milk consumed in Portugal comes from dairy herds of three cows or fewer. Those are the herds which Mr. MacSharry proposes to support. Equally, one cannot help but wonder why Mr. MacSharry wants to give small Irish farmers with herds of only 40 cows extra money to keep them in business while their larger partners in Wales with 50 cows are put out of business by the proposals.

Under Mr. MacSharry's proposals, 85 per cent. of United Kingdom production of milk would suffer a cut, whereas only 32 per cent. of the production in Europe would suffer a cut. There is a tremendous slant against the United Kingdom. In cereals, 58 per cent. of United Kingdom area and revenues would be cut by up to 27 per cent., whereas 56 per cent. of EC area and revenues would be increased by 5 per cent. There would be no reduction in the support prices of sheep for our 11 partners in the EC. All reductions would fall on the bigger flocks in the United Kingdom. Matters would be a great deal worse if Mr. MacSharry's proposals were seen through.

I am extremely glad, as are most British farmers, that we have such a strong Minister to stick up for the interests of British farmers. He showed that by his spirited performance at the annual general meeting of the National Farmers Union earlier this week. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food deserves congratulation and recognition for what he has been able to do for British farmers. It is important to remember, as he said, that 80 per cent. of European support money is dished out by Europe and only 20 per cent. is provided by domestic Governments.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Would the hon. Gentleman support a move to ask the Government to abandon the CAP and return to national Governments the right of support? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Does he agree that that would allow individual small farmers to have a proper income and that it would benefit taxpayers?

Mr. Marland: The hon. Lady has obviously struck a chord with some of my hon. Friends. But as we are a partner in the European community, I do not see how we could possibly come out of the CAP.

As I said, the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Minister should be recognised. He has done a good job in seeking more money from our Treasury to support farmers in difficult and disadvantaged areas. The 14 per cent. increase that he announced earlier this week will go down well in all districts.

I notice that the Liberal party's motion calls for more money for environmental projects and works and more assistance to farmers for marketing, but grants are already available. Grants are being slewed towards encouraging more environmental work, under the countryside stewardship and other schemes. Tree planting and care of trees once they are planted is being encouraged. I hope that soon we may see a system whereby farmers are encouraged to take care of existing trees and woodlands and given some small recognition for doing so.

Grants are available for new projects which farmers want to launch and for feasibility and marketing studies. Although set-aside is a controversial matter, in marginal cereal-growing areas it is widely welcomed. It is an alternative for cereal growers. The money goes direct to the farmer, rather than into storage and disposal, about which so many people have already expressed their displeasure today.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would make more sense and be more popular among farmers if more effort were put into a programme of extensification, rather than set-aside, which can promote more intensive farming methods on the land still in use and is unpopular with the farmer and the consumer?

Mr. Marland: I shall come to efficiency and intensive agriculture in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

Another of the many alternatives being suggested to farmers offers a way in which they can improve their business and their cash flow. My right hon. Friend the Minister has asked local authorities to ease planning permission on projects put forward by farmers to make use of redundant farm buildings and other rural projects. Farmers should be congratulated on drawing up such schemes. Perhaps another letter from my right hon. Friend the Minister to local authorities reminding them of that request would not go amiss.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): How can my hon. Friend seriously say that set-aside is a success? He must know that we have spent a fortune paying people for not growing cereals, yet the amount of land used for cereal production has increased by 212,000 hectares. How does that make economic or common sense?

Mr. Marland: The extra ground which has come into production may well have been balanced to some extent by the amount of ground that has been taken out of production. We do not seek to dictate to farmers exactly what they should do with their land. We seek to give them a menu of alternatives while telling them—the majority accept it—that we are not prepared to continue financing increased production indefinitely.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) spoke earlier about proposals for bringing more land for letting onto the market. He may be interested to know—I hope that one of his colleagues will relay the message to him—that some of us on the Conservative Back Benches had the Tenant Farmers Association to see us earlier this week, which welcomed with open arms my right hon. Friend the Minister's proposals. Again, my right hon. Friend should be congratulated.

We have never wavered from backing efficient production. We have said a firm no to the theory of supply management, which is not the right way forward. Furthermore, it is a myth to imagine that small farmers are more environmentally conscious than large farmers. In my experience, small farmers need all the money they can generate on their farm in order to survive. They cannot leave money aside to invest in promoting and succouring wildlife.

I am not keen on the endless move towards smaller farms, nor the assistance given to them at the expense of larger ones. In this connection, I am talking about either the farms that we describe as small ones, or the allotments in Europe that are regarded as small farms.

I have a friend in south-west Scotland, in Wigtown, who farms some of the most difficult land in that country. He has 1,100 suckler cows and he employs 14 men. He also employs members of those men's families, and together they have created a worthwhile and solid agricultural unit. It is wrong that that efficient farm should be penalised so that support can be given to smaller, less efficient family farms. His family farm is much respected by everyone who lives in the district.

As we move into a more competitive world I am glad that my right hon. Friend has asked the Milk Marketing Board to make some suggestions as to how it can become more appropriate for today's market. Apparently the announcement on that will be made on 6 March and I hope that the board will offer some constructive suggestions for the way forward. A lot has changed in 60 years—the board fulfilled a much-needed role then, but not today.

It is not right to deride the dairy trade industry because it is seeking to change the board. Of course it is, because it wants the right product so that its members can obtain maximum value from what they are seeking to produce. Some yoghurt producers want low butter-fat content milk, but they cannot get that from the Milk Marketing Board. It is right that the board should be asked to modernise so that more money can go to the farmers. I hope that Bob Steven, the chairman, will get solid support from the 15 farmers who also serve on the board.

It is a competitive world in the EC, and I hope that the Minister will do something to improve the lot of our farmers regarding salmonella. The Select Committee on Agriculture held an inquiry into salmonella and the Ministry responded by introducing a system for slaughtering chickens infected with salmonella. That system has done a fantastically good job of cleaning up egg production in the United Kingdom, but what about the eggs that are imported? Few of them are ever checked for salmonella. That process takes five days and I know that random checks are undertaken, but by the time the salmonella infection has been proven, the rest of the eggs in that batch will have been eaten. Often imported eggs are repacked and the box carries the message "packed in England", so some of our less well informed housewives

[Mr. Marland]

think that they are English eggs. That is causing great difficulties for our egg producers, and I hope that Ministers will do something about it.

I am sceptical about the attempts to improve animal welfare. I am a farmer and I do not want anyone in the House to think for one minute that I am against animal welfare. I am glad, however, that the Ministry has set an eight-year lapse before dry sow stalls and tethers are to be abolished. I hope that that abolition will promote happy pork, produced in the United Kingdom, so that people do not choose imported pork. However, we still eat a lot of white veal and pate de foie gras that is produced abroad, and those processes show scant regard for animal welfare. That has not dried up the demand for those products.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Such products should be banned.

Mr. Marland: Those processes have been banned here, but not on the continent. Such matters should be taken up vigorously by our vigorous Minister. I am sure that that will happen.

A year ago, the price of a calf stood at £155; now, it is £45. I understand from a reliable source that imports from eastern Europe have depressed the calf price in this country. Those calves are smuggled over the border into what used to be known as East Germany, and they are then released on to the market. Those calves are being imported by the lorry load—30 lorries a day—and, as they are sold in the EC market, they attract extra grants and subsidies. That is having a serious effect by depressing the price of beef in this country. I know that other hon. Members have heard similar tales. I hope that the Minister will take steps to bring that practice to an end.

Fallen stock used to be picked up by the knacker men who made money from it by turning it into tallow. However, the market for tallow has dropped and farmers are now being asked to bury their own dead or fallen stock on their premises. It is quite a big job to bury a cow, and the only alternative is incineration. We know that there is not enough incineration capacity in this country and we have all seen pictures in the press of open pyres with bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected cattle being burnt on them.

What is the Government's attitude to the establishment of more animal incinerators? Someone in my constituency wants to build such an incinerator and, believe me, that is a controversial issue. No one wants such an incinerator near their house or village. I should be interested to learn the Ministry's attitude towards incinerators and whether it has in any way encouraged the building or development of such incinerators.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I have been pursuing the problem of fallen stock for the past 15 months. Does my hon. Friend agree that it might be a good idea to have on-farm disposal pits or an incinerator system? Those suggestions deserve a 50 per cent. grant under the farm improvement scheme or some pump priming from the local authorities.

Mr. Marland: That is a useful suggestion. I raised that very issue in the hope that Ministers can enlighten me about it. I understand that the Governments in some other EC countries take a positive role in providing incinerator facilities for fallen stock.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Incinerators and animal processing units should be built as far away as possible from any village, farmhouse or populated area. They must be built near motorways and provided with a decent motorway exit, but they must be well away from all inhabited dwellings. My constituency has suffered this problem for the past 20 years, and it does not go away.

Mr. Marland: Thanks for the warning. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says about that when he replies.

Agriculture is going through a difficult stage now, but it is a cyclical business and it would be wrong to lose sight of our objectives in the reform of the CAP. We have a spirited team of Ministers to look after the interests of our farmers in Europe, their attitude is enormously to their credit. I recommend to my hon. Friends that we should throw out the Liberal Democrat motion with little ceremony.

5.47 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) raised specific issues relating to fallen stock and farm size and I hope that the Minister will respond to those issues.

I shall not deal with the specific aspects of the current crisis facing agriculture, but I shall outline the general problems that confront farmers throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

Agriculture is in a crisis which is affecting almost every sector. The range and diversity of the problems make it difficult to know where to start to provide solutions, but those solutions—be they long-term or short-term—are desperately needed. The problems are clear. Farm incomes are now at their lowest level in real terms since the end of the second world war. Farmers are also facing difficulties because of high interest rates and increased input costs. A record number of farmers have left agriculture—I believe that, in the past 10 years, 80,000 farmers have left farming: that fact speaks for itself.

The crisis is affecting every sector of agriculture. In the beef sector, store prices have tumbled. The dairy sector has been affected. In sheep farming, there has been a 30 to 40 per cent. fall in lamb prices over the past two years alone. Cereals, too, have been affected. The result is falling farm incomes. That means that there is no money for investment and that further trouble is being stored up for the future.

Looming ominously over all this are the GATT talks and a disastrous CAP, both internally within the European Community and externally in its relations with the rest of the world. The European Community, with its common agricultural policy with massive surplus production, also happens to be the world's leading agricultural importer and the world's second largest exporter. Its common agricultural policy is a recipe for trouble unless it is sorted out.

The question is: how will it be sorted out and in whose interests? Scotland's problem is that our farmers listened to Governments and followed their policy directions, backed up by the world's finest agricultural research organisations. The very products of Scottish agricultural

success—larger, efficient units, top-quality production allied to massive investment in machinery and farm improvements—are threatening the livelihood of farmers throughout Scotland who have followed Government policy up to now.

It would be easy to catalogue the problems facing the industry—the livestock disaster threatening the hills and uplands, the annihilation facing Scotland's magnificent soft fruit industry because of short-term eastern European bulk imports, the poultry and beef sectors rocking back under recent health scares, and so on. It is more important to ask the Government what they intend to do positively about the problems. The Minister did not address that earlier. He spent much time attacking the Liberal Democrats but very little addressing his answer to the current problems.

It is not much use telling us that we should have attended the NFU meeting. Surely it would be better for the Minister to be in the Chamber, stating positively what he will do to answer the MacSharry proposals. We are entitled to ask the Government to spell out clearly what they intend to put in place of the unacceptable European proposals. We need a clear statement of the long-term proposals for the industry. Agriculture by definition requires longer-term planning if it is to survive and prosper.

The bane of agriculture has been a series of short-sighted, short-term solutions which have stored up the present problems. "Food From Our Own Resources" is a historical document, but it was the nearest that any United Kingdom Government ever got to a general, integrated, co-ordinated plan for agriculture. The more is the pity. Instead of clear thinking and a stable set of policy guidelines, we have witnessed a series of manoeuvres, wheezes and sticking plaster solutions.

For farmers that has meant a series of changing roles. They are now custodians of the land, with a range of changing products and income bases from farm shops to golf courses, from afforestation to raising red deer and llama, and chasing the bed-and-breakfast tourist trade, as well as income substitute schemes, such as set-aside. All this has happened rapidly and is simply a survival mechanism against falling agricultural income. That is where the Government should concentrate their minds. They should consider how to get money back into the rural areas of Scotland and into the pockets of the people to allow them to live and prosper in their rural communities.

The reality is an industry turning cartwheels because it does not know what it has to do to survive. Only Governments, who take the decisions, can tell farmers. That is what the Minister must do. It is no use attacking MacSharry and getting his first NFU round of applause for years. The Minister must state his positive proposals to give stability, income and a future to the agricultural industry.

What is the Government's view of agriculture in 10 years' time or even in five years' time? Where do the Government want the industry to be? What do they want the industry to produce? What is the Government's attitude to rural areas and communities? Do they really want the hills and upland areas to be cleared of population? That is exactly the direction in which Government policies are taking the hills and upland areas in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Agriculture has shown its adaptability and its immense capacity for efficiency and change, but it needs a set of guidelines about where it is expected to go. Leaving structural changes to be decided by the brute forces of bankruptcy and unfettered temporary market forces is an abnegation of responsibility by the Government.

While appreciating the necessity to cut production and export subsidies, the SNP believes that the cash saved by the cuts should be redirected into the guidance section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund to finance structural programmes to assist the rural economy. The Scottish Office should press for structural programmes for all the less-favoured areas in Scotland to include support for quality-assured schemes, diversification of farm activities into such areas as farm woodlands and new forms of quality production, as well as general support for social, commercial and small-scale industrial activity throughout the rural economy.

It is not in the interests of Scottish or European consumers and taxpayers to see agricultural production slashed through farm bankruptcies and economic hardship throughout remote rural communities. The Commission's proposals to concentrate farm support on small farms ignore the serious financial problems facing so-called large Scottish hill farms in marginal areas, where farm incomes may be considerably less than on many small farms.

The British Government led the Council of Ministers in the demand for cuts in production subsidies to aid the GATT talks. The Government must now lead a campaign to ensure that the application of the Commission's new proposals does not lead to a new wave of clearances from the land.

Scotland is capable of self-sufficiency in all aspects of food production associated with a temporate climate. It is the SNP's policy to maintain that position and to ensure that production above that level is aimed at high-quality foods for export. It is also our intention, which I recommend to the Government, to ensure that agriculture remains a mainstay of the rural economy and that, where practicable, it should be organised around units of viable family farms.

I remind the Minister that agriculture is proportionately far more important to the Scottish economy than it is to the United Kingdom economy. We believe that Scottish agriculture would benefit massively if Scotland had independent representation on the Council of Ministers and on the European Commission, and increased representation in the European Parliament. All that the Minister and his colleagues have done in Europe has convinced me more and more of the truth of that statement.

We seek a system that allows stability in price, in markets, in Government policies and in income levels, and with a clear goal for the future structure and production levels of agriculture. Agriculture is by nature a long-term activity; it must not be allowed to be gutted by short-term factors.

6 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I assure the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) that I appreciate the way in which the farmers of Scotland have suffered in recent weeks because of the weather conditions. My farmers on Exmoor and the Brendon hills have been coping with snow up to 1½ ft deep.

[Mr. David Nicholson]

The considerable difficulties which farmers in Somerset and the west country face were summed up in the *Somerset Farmer*, reporting Professor John Webster of Bristol University as having told the NFU county annual meeting in Taunton a few weeks ago:

"We are no longer lovable in the eyes of the consumer, and we are poor as well. To be rich and unloved would be bearable. To be poor but lovable would not be so bad. But to be both poor and unloved, as we are, smacks, as Oscar Wilde put it, of carelessness."

Despite that plight, we can boast certain success stories. We have the success of Liscombe research, launched by the Minister in another place about two years ago. That is happening on Exmoor. Also, increased interest is being shown by the farming community in Somerset and the west country in marketing their produce, summed up in *Somerset Farmer* for February of this year as follows:

"Quality not quantity should be the aim if farmers are to regain both their popularity and profit over the years ahead."

I hope that the Ministry will continue to support in every way possible Taste of Somerset, which helps to market the foodstuffs that we produce. I commend greatly our excellent Somerset brie, which is equally as good, probably better, than the French product, and while my constituency is well known for Taunton cider, produced by the very successful company of that name, the real cognoscenti, when it is not Lent, partake of Sheppy's farmhouse cider, and I am delighted to see on the Government Front Bench my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) who visited Sheppy's about this time last year. I cannot remember whether it was Lent.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) referred to the need to check on unhealthy imported eggs. On 31 January, as reported in column *615* of *Hansard*, I received an excellent written answer from the Under-Secretary of State for Health in which he listed all the dates on which infected imported eggs had been found, with the countries of origin. I regret to say that the country of origin was usually Holland. I hope that that problem will be tackled.

Having heard much in recent years of NFU criticism of Her Majesty's Government, I am delighted to quote from a resolution that was passed on 28 January by the Somerset and South Avon county branch of the NFU which, unlike the Liberal party and the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howell), was unequivocal in its view of the MacSharry proposals. It said that it

"condemns commissioner MacSharry's proposals for reform of the CAP as being deeply damaging and discriminatory against United Kingdom agriculture as a whole and against full-time family farms in the United Kingdom in particular."

The Minister will be encouraged by the next part of the resolution, which

"fully supports the Minister of Agriculture in his opposition to the proposals, calls for the package to be scrapped and insists that the EC Agriculture Commissioner goes back to the drawing board and produces proposals which address the problem of rising support costs and falling farm incomes without damaging the interests of any particular group of farmers or any particular EC Member State."

The county branch estimated that, for a dairy producer with 85 cows, which is not a large herd, returns under the MacSharry proposals would be down by nearly 20 per cent. The Department has produced similar examples.

We congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on his firm commitment to the farming community and the wider interest of the nation, the countryside and food production that he has shown in recent months. At Bournemouth last year, he said:

"If farmers cannot earn a living then they cannot look after the land."

He said much the same in his speech to the NFU conference in London. He set out the issues clearly. He exposed the ghastly term "modulation," which sounds like an expression used in music teaching—I suppose that we are being made to suffer an Irish music lesson—and the extraordinary proposals there.

I am glad that the Minister mentioned in his speech to the NFU conference what appears to be a tobacco scandal. Apparently, nearly £1 billion is going into subsidising the production of quite low-grade tobacco, which I believe is exported to third world countries and does immense harm to the health of the people there. I have received letters from my constituents on the subject. I hope that the responsible Departments, whether the Department of Trade and Industry or the Department of Health, will tackle this matter.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his announcement this week of a 14 per cent. increase in the hill livestock compensatory amounts, which will be welcome to my hard-pressed sheep producers, and in responding on Tuesday to the interests of young farmers in producing his tenancy proposals.

I am constantly reminded by farmers in my constituency that we must have a policy to replace the generation of farmers approaching retirement. The statistics show that many farmers now in work are relatively old and are approaching retirement, and it is difficult to know who will replace them, as so many sons of existing farmers are not interested in taking on even family farms. I hope that the tenancy proposals will help with that state of affairs.

At the same time, I warn Ministers of the danger of encouraging farmers or intended farmers to get into debt. I make no apology for raising this matter, which I raised earlier with the Prime Minister—the contribution of the banks and other lending institutions to business indebtedness in recent years. I have particularly in mind the effects on farmers, because an important factor that reduces the overall net incomes of British farmers, who are larger-scale and more efficient than continental farmers, is the indebtedness into which they have got in recent years. I welcome the Prime Minister's sympathetic comments on that matter.

I again press the Minister to bring forward as soon as possible more comprehensive and co-ordinated schemes to help the environment and countryside. We have many small schemes which are excellent—including environmentally sensitive areas, less-favoured areas, the farm woodlands scheme and so on—but the farming and environmental community want more co-ordination between the various schemes.

In that respect, my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) and for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and I supported the giving of LFA status to parts of the Blackdown hills in our constituencies. The Department took proposals to that effect to Brussels, and, although they were good proposals which encompassed

the parishes on the Blackdown hills in my constituency, they were turned down on what we thought were spurious statistics.

There is now a proposal from the Countryside Commission to give the area outstanding natural beauty status. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and I support that, but emphasise that it must be accompanied by environmentally sensitive area status, which includes grants and produces incomes for the farmers involved. We must have co-ordination between the various schemes, and I hope that the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment will work together to achieve that.

I shall not spend time today on the proposals of the Liberals, much though I respect the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North, because he and his hon. Friends will get nowhere near governing this country. But some of our farming constituents might be considering the prospect of a Labour Government.

On that basis, it is worth while reminding them of two comments made by Labour's senior agriculture spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clarke). He is not in his place for the debate, and I note that the Labour party is rather diminished in its Back-Bench support. In *Farming News* of 1 June 1990, he was reported as having said about agriculture:

"We have no strategy and we won't have until the general election."

I hope that farmers will see through that. At a recent Question Time in which I participated, he asked:

"Is the Minister not aware that it simply does not make sense to throw good money after bad to subsidise farmers?" —[*Official Report*, 29 November 1990; Vol. 181, col. 998.]

Farmers will remember that as we approach the next general election. They will see through the Labour party's blandishments in trying to coax support from the countryside.

6.9 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): Last November, I was unlucky enough to come second in the ballot for private Members' motions. I chose a subject almost identical to the one that we are debating today, though I limited it to the future of Welsh farming, since it is areas such as mine in Wales that are being hit hardest by the conditions created in agriculture over the last 10 years. I believe that such areas throughout the United Kingdom will suffer a decline of catastrophic proportions if farming is subjected to the continued pressures of dropping prices, crippling interest rates, high inflation and the vagaries of the weather, compounded by badly handled food scares and, in the sheep sector, French protectionism.

Farmers, especially small farmers, are in a vice. On the one hand, to maintain incomes they must intensify and modernise. That threatens the industry's long-term sustainability and can harm the natural environment, the social structure in rural areas and even, possibly, public health. On the other hand, current methods of farm support are discredited by consumers and taxpayers alike; they do not even support farming, which is their stated aim.

Farmers in areas like mine will not be able to continue in agriculture and also continue to protect the visual and amenity value of the countryside if prices keep declining. Last October, draft ewes were selling for £15. In 1989, they made £27, and the year before that, £35. The Government's own figures bear this out. They show that farm incomes in Wales were cut by more than £12 million last year, on top of a fall of over £20 the previous year. If prices continue to decline and price support is cut also, farming will have little future on the hills of Wales.

This drop in prices alone would be bad enough, but when it is coupled with higher prices for machinery and inputs, huge rises in interest rates, the poll tax, reduced services in rural areas—bus services have been decimated in my area since deregulation—it makes the rural situation dire. The list does not stop there. Water connection charges have quintupled since privatisation and telephone connection charges, too, have risen. Post offices are being forced to close, and small shops are becoming non-viable. The rural environment in Wales and elsewhere is under serious threat.

If farmers are driven off the land—it is happening already—whole parishes will become wastelands. In my constituency, farmers with family farms feel powerless. They see lamb on sale in Tesco's for the equivalent of £70, when they have received possibly £25; they see their bills rising remorselessly; they see capital tied up in equipment that they cannot use because they cannot afford the staff to operate it.

Faced with this depressing scenario, what are the Government doing? They have given a small increase—14 per cent.—in hill livestock compensatory amount payments. That is very welcome indeed, of course, but it must be remembered that farmers' total incomes have fallen by 22 per cent. in the last year alone. If the HLCA payments are adjusted, in real terms—that is, taking account of 1990-91 prices—the £142 million that is to be spent this year is approximately the same as the amount paid in 1988, and is less than that paid in 1987.

The Minister, quite rightly, rubbished the proposals for reform of the CAP that Commissioner MacSharry published recently. I am afraid that the Minister also attempted to score a cheap debating point when I put a question to him on 24 January. That was deplorable because, as he must know, I do not speak from the Front Bench, and therefore could not reply.

My question related to leaked proposals, which, so far as I was aware at the time—the Minister may have had other information; for all I know, he himself may have leaked the proposals—related to a reduction of expenditure on intervention and to support for small farmers. When it turned out that Mr. MacSharry's detailed proposals contained a definition of "small farm" that excluded the kind of small family farm in my constituency and in most other parts of Great Britain, it was clear that the results of the proposals would be quite different from their aims.

It is true, however, that the document of the Council for the Protection of Rural England—"Future Harvest"—is very similar to the Labour party's policy, and not very different from that of the National Farmers Union. Mr. MacSharry's proposals certainly would not help British farming at all. They seem designed to help the tiny, inefficient farmers of southern Europe, while creating large areas of wasteland out of the efficient family farms of Wales.

While, as I have said, the Government rightly criticised Mr. MacSharry's proposal, they seemed very reticent about coming forward with anything of their own. I suppose that, as their entire philosophy is based on slavish adherence to the free market, this is hardly surprising. A

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

free market, which even the Minister acknowledges does not exist, would mean our farmers having to compete with world prices determined by levels of subsidy, both hidden and overt, paid to farmers elsewhere.

People in Britain want to enjoy the countryside as well as its produce. They do not want it to decline into a derelict industrial site. However, what can the Government do? We on the Labour side believe that there is a viable future for British farming, but it requires an alternative approach that would be very distasteful to avowed free marketeers. We support the payment of direct income aids to farmers who need support most. Furthermore, we believe that the objectives of the CAP should be broadened to embrace qualitative aspects of food production, including the provision of safe, wholesome food at a reasonable cost, the sensitive management of agricultural land and the maintenance of rural communities. Green premiums would be introduced—farmers would receive a payment for managing their farms according to agreed criteria to encourage less intensive farming methods.

I am sure that the farmers in my constituency, especially those who wish their families to continue in farming, would welcome the opportunity to farm in such a sustainable way, to be able to plan for a future and to perform their very real role as custodians of the countryside.

6.17 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I begin by declaring an interest: I am a farmer.

I read the Liberal motion with some astonishment. Of all the parties in this House, the Liberals are the most fanatically pro-Europe. They know perfectly well that agriculture is a European policy, and that 80 per cent. of agricultural expenditure is authorised by the EC, yet their motion ignores that fact. They dismiss it in precisely eight words, in an extremely lengthy motion.

The Liberals know, too, that, ever since the Conservatives took office in 1979, our Ministers have been trying ceaselessly, in season and out of season, to change the CAP. For years they came up against a brick wall. They were the only Ministers trying to change the policy; all the others were in favour of it. But now even the most bigoted can see that the CAP is leading to disaster, and our Ministers are at least getting some support from the others—and not before time.

No one now pretends that the situation is other than serious. The future is uncertain, but it is at just such a time that we need a tough Minister who will fight hard for us. We certainly have just such a friend in the present Minister. He is a jolly good chap to have in our corner, but he has certainly got a fight on his hands.

The greatest problem is the wholly biased and unrealistic attitude of the European Agriculture Commissioner, Mr. MacSharry. It is incredible that someone who has such a romantic, nursery-rhyme concept of agriculture should have been appointed Agriculture Commissioner in the first place. If it were not so serious, it would be laughable. He equates small with good, and his proposals weight the scales against efficient farmers, in favour of small farmers—just because they are small, not because they are good. His idea of a family farm is a tiny, heavily subsidised smallholding—possibly somewhere in Eire or in Germany—where the husband works in a car factory during the day, works on the farm part-time and lives off subsidies. This is certainly not in the interests of consumers, who want to see food produced as efficiently, not as romantically, as possible, at prices they can afford.

The words "family farms" in the Liberal motion send shivers up my spine. The Liberals use that term at their peril, because their idea of a family farm and the continentals' idea of a family farm are poles apart. It would be crazy so to arrange farm prices that only farmers with fewer than 40 cows could make a living; 60 per cent. of British milk producers would suffer savage cuts, compared with only 1 per cent. in Greece, Spain and Portugal.

The farmers in my constituency will have noted with interest the Minister's observation that in north-west Lancashire and the Dales, out of 7,937 active milk producers, 58 per cent. would suffer a 10 per cent. quota cut if the MacSharry proposals were to be implemented. His proposals will cut cereal support prices by 40 per cent., but farmers with under 30 hectares would be fully compensated, and twice as many continental farmers as British farmers would be compensated. Under the proposals, 20 per cent. of United Kingdom cereal areas would have to be taken out of production but only half that amount in the EC. He also wants to reduce the headage rates for sheep, which would affect us more than any other country. This would be utterly disastrous for farmers in my part of the world.

The proposals are absolutely idiotic because, by encouraging the least efficient farmers—Mr. MacSharry always refers to them not as inefficient farmers but as family farmers—Mr. MacSharry would leave the world markets wide open for the United States, Australia and New Zealand exporters. The United Kingdom would be driven from the world markets. If farming is to survive as an economic activity in this country, the proposals must be defeated. The Minister devotes much energy to ensuring that they are defeated and to building up coalitions in the European Community. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) will know that, in the European Community, we have to build up coalitions in order to achieve anything. However, we need to replace those proposals with ones that will be less costly to the taxpayer and will go directly to the farmer, while improving and maintaining the environment.

If support prices are to be reduced, they must be reduced fairly throughout the EC and in the general agreement on tariffs and trade. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) seems to be more interested in the incomes of those in the developing world than the incomes of our farmers. I am very interested in the developing world and have served on committees and delegations that have been there.

Mr. Morley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I shall give way in a moment.

Farmers in the developing world can grow a great many crops that we cannot grow and they should concentrate on them. If we must take cuts in support for our products, we must insist that support prices for wine, olive oil, tobacco and cotton are also reduced. It must not pay southern European farmers to produce for intervention, as they

were doing until quite recently. They must also be obliged to obtain an increasing share of their income from the market.

Set-aside may reduce surpluses in the arable sector, but the countryside must not be left looking ugly. It must be environmentally cared for and financed. We must be certain that, if we set land aside, other EC countries do not increase their production to fill the gap. For centuries, the British have taken it for granted that farmers do not merely produce food, but care for the appearance of the countryside. After all, they had the biggest interest in doing so, as their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren would inherit that countryside. That was easier to achieve when labour was cheap and plentiful, but it takes much training, skill and time to maintain the dry stone walls and lay hedges, which are so beautifully maintained in my part of the country, and which townspeople will drive many miles to see.

If urban dwellers want farmers to care for the countryside, farmers should be paid a fee—not a subsidy—for maintaining our hedges and walls in the traditional way. There is much more mileage in the environmentally sensitive areas scheme, which benefits farmer and visitor alike. The cost of caring for the countryside should be an integral part of the common agricultural policy and should be paid for, not just tacked on at the end.

Farmers are fiercely individual, and the huge, and economically powerful food processors and chain stores take advantage of that fact to cut prices to farmers. Ten years ago, milling wheat cost £105 a tonne and the housewife's loaf cost 34p, of which the farmer received 8·5p. Now, milling wheat costs about £110, and a loaf costs 50p, of which the farmer receives 9p—just ½p more in 10 years. The remainder is gobbled up by the processors and retailers. There should be a fair balance between what the farmer receives and what the consumer pays, and the middleman should not skim off all the cream.

A substantial fall in interest rates would help farmers most. Yesterday's 0·5 per cent. fall is welcome, but a further 0·5 per cent. cut in the near future could make the difference between survival and failure for many farmers. I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for the 14 per cent. increase in the hill cow subsidy and higher-rate ewes announced on Monday, and his efforts to have payments made more rapidly, to which my farmers attach much importance.

I shall close as I began. When things are tough, one must know who one's friends are; I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister is a friend of agriculture and will fight hard in Europe for British farmers and housewives.

6.25 pm

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Mid-Staffordshire): Opposition Members have often criticised the Government's economic policy, highlighting its disastrous impact on industry, commerce and families. Among the many groups who have been adversely affected are the farming community. They do not always have a good public image. Perhaps in the past they have cried wolf too often, but this year there seems to be a great deal of substance to their claims that they are facing difficulties.

Farming income is at its lowest for 40 years and, according to the National Farmers Union, farmers' bank debts have soared to £7·3 million. That combination spells disaster and hardship, for behind every stastistic there is an everyday story of country folk who face difficulties. High interest rates have been one of the major factors, and the 0·5 per cent. drop announced yesterday, although welcome, is by no means enough to solve the problems. The farmer who owns his own farm, has no overdraft and no hired labour may be able to weather the storm if he draws in his belt, but far more typical is the tenant farmer who has an overdraft and employs farm workers. He faces several problems. He also faces the justifiable demands of the farm workers, who are seeking to earn a reasonable living wage as they too try to cope with additional financial pressures.

Farmers whom I have met in my constituency are aware of the need to meet those demands, but they regard them as yet another pressure on them. For that group of farmers, there can be no light at the end of the tunnel. The National Farmers Union says that farmers' debts for 1990 were five times as great as their income, which dropped by 15 per cent. that year. I have spoken to farmers whose income is unsufficient to service their overdrafts. One Mid-Staffordshire farmer has shown me his bank statements over a 10-year period. His overdraft has increased by 800 per cent., his standard of living has declined considerably, yet he is working as hard in 1991 as he was in the 1980s—if not harder.

Some farmers have solved that problem by selling parts of their farms—providing that they can find buyers. In addition to high interest rates, farmers are struggling with falling crop and livestock prices. Many farmers in Mid-Staffordshire rely on members of their families to provide the extra labour required to manage the farm. That extra pair of hands is often provided by their wives, who not only help on the farm but may even run bed and breakfast to help supplement the family income. Farmers with children express concern and disappointment that their children no longer work the family farm, not necessarily because they do not want to, but because they are offered much better-paid jobs elsewhere, perhaps with perks and conditions with which the farmers cannot compete. The income from farming cannot support the family unit.

Farmers are worried not only about the loss of a pair of hands, but about the future of farming and rural communities. The nature of the industry is such that when farmers are planting crops or breeding and buying livestock they need stability to help long-term planning—and that has been missing. Farmers also need a Government who will respond quickly to their need for advice or compensation when faced with crises such as salmonella or BSE. They want reforms in the CAP, so that most of the budget does not go on disposing of surpluses which are both inefficient and morally wrong.

Perhaps British farmers have been the victims of their own success at improving efficiency and productivity. The subsidy must help both the supplier and the consumer. If reforms do not take place, we are likely to be left with some large ranch-type farms at one end and small part-time farms, like many in Europe, at the other.

In the past we have relied on the farmers to manage the countryside so that we can all enjoy the benefits of their good husbandry. The farmers, however, will not be able to continue to be the caretakers of the countryside if they are short of money. That is why a policy like that of the Labour party, which offers green premiums to help farmers to protect the countryside and grow food using fewer chemicals, is attractive to them.

[Mrs. Sylvia Heal]

Tomorrow morning, more than 52 million people will require breakfast, and most of the ingredients of their breakfasts will be supplied by the British farmer. Will that still happen in 10 years' time, or will we rely even more on imports from the rest of the world?

As a Member representing a farming constituency, and as a consumer who wants the security of knowing that we have a stable home agriculture, I declare an interest in the future of farming. This debate has been about the crisis in farming, and, to judge from what I hear from farmers in my constituency, they believe that the Government cannot solve their problems in that crisis.

6.32 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Northern Ireland has a unique place in agriculture in the United Kingdom because agriculture is its main industry. More than a third of its exports come from the agriculture sector, which provides more employment in its ancillary industries than any other source of employment. Therefore, Northern Ireland is interested in and shocked by what is happening in agriculture today.

I believe that it would be in the best interests of farmers if the common agricultural policy were scrapped and we returned to national Governments looking after their own farmers. I heard the Minister saying that he hates the MacSharry proposals and that he was going to fight them and defeat them; but I want to ask how he proposes to do that. Under the new voting arrangements in the Council of Ministers, opposition from the United Kingdom, even in concert with one or two other states, would not be enough to block any package supported by the other member states. What is happening in agriculture, as the Parliamentary Secretary well knows, is politics. It has nothing to do with good farming or good production. That is why Portugal, Italy and Ireland—and Mr. MacSharry—are involved. The sooner the House faces up to that, the better for everyone concerned.

The Parliamentary Secretary has been in Europe and he knows what is happening there. He has been a Member of the European Parliament. I asked in a parliamentary question recently what consultations the Commission has had with Her Majesty's Government about the proposals for the compensation of the small family farmers of Northern Ireland. I was not referring to farmers with two or three acres; I was talking about farmers with an average 50 acres. That is the size of the average small family farm in Northern Ireland. In any event, I was told in a written answer that there had so far been no specific consultations on this question between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Commission. How do farmers feel about that? I am sure that the House would like to know what substitute or alternative proposals there are—what strategy the Minister intends to pursue.

Farming is in crisis, and more so in Northern Ireland because of our special position. People in Britain buying cereals do not have to pay extra transport costs for them as we do. Every farmer in Northern Ireland is at a disadvantage from the start. Now they will be at an even greater disadvantage; they will be pushed off the land altogether.

The Minister would help us all by telling us tonight what his alternative strategy is and how he intends to call on the EEC to reject the MacSharry proposals and replace them with proposals that will help throughout the Community. Does he have alternatives; can he sell them and find the necessary support to defeat the proposals? There is a political coalition in the EEC which is not interested in farming. It is interested in the EEC purse and in how deeply it can put its hand into that purse.

These are the facts as I see them, as a Member of the European Parliament.

6.36 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): This has been a debate about a serious issue. Agriculture unquestionably faces its worst crisis since the war. I welcome the Minister's presence throughout the debate, but I regret the absence of the shadow Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the absence of any Scottish Minister.

After the war, we first had a long period of relative stability, ushered in by Tom Williams. It is right to pay tribute to him for what he did. Then we joined the European Community and had a relatively short but enormously successful period of expansion and increased production and productivity, during which, through the common agricultural policy, we achieved a 75 per cent. self-sufficiency rate.

Many Members have rightly said that the CAP is in desperate need of reform—but we must remember two things: first, that it produced self-sufficiency where before there was shortage; and secondly, that when there began to be over-production, the European Commission, which is often vilified, repeatedly brought the problem to the attention of the Council of Ministers, with proposals for rectifying it. It was the political failure of the Council of Ministers to tackle these matters which lies at the root of our present problems.

I notice the Minister nodding happily, and that is all very well; but, for example, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, went down to the west country weeks before milk quotas were introduced urging farmers in the west country to adopt the solution of producing more and more. So we share our part of the blame for that.

There is uncertainty, and lack of confidence and of a sense of a clear way ahead—and we tax the Government with all those things.

The Minister provided us with a sort of low-grade entertainment show—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was perhaps a little better. I want to quote a letter from a constituent, Mrs. Mary MacKenzie of Newtonmore, written on 12 January:

"We all know that the British Government are able to increase HLCA payments, but not only will they not announce an increase, they have not even sent out the application forms yet."

The letter was written in response to a letter that I had sent to the Minister of State in the House of Lords with responsibility for Scottish agriculture. It continued:

"In any other year our completed form would be being processed by now and we would be awaiting the cheque a good proportion of which (£2,900—last year) would be used to pay the farmer who winters our hogs and gimmers. He says"—

that is, the Minister in the Lords—

'the French farmers have been 'especially hard hit'. When I first wrote to you we were very despondent, having just sold our calves with much reduced income, but worse was to come

when we sold the sheep and lambs. In 1989 our income from the autumn sales of sheep, cast ewes, claves and cast cows was £25,784 and 1990 that income was £19,032·10."

That is a very large drop. I accept that the HLCA has now been paid, but neither the Minister's speech nor his record impresses people who are struggling with debt.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who led for the Opposition, delivered a sensible and constructive speech and was right to attack the Minister's obsession with size. The hon. Member for Gloucester, West (Mr. Marland) helped us with a useful critique of the figures proposed by MacSharry. He was quite right, of course, but if the figures are changed, matters could also greatly change.

For example, the NFU calculation on milk shows that, if 200,000 litres is used as a definition of a small milk producer, cuts in Germany will be 3 per cent., in France 5 per cent., in Denmark 17 per cent., in the Netherlands 30 per cent. and in the United Kingdom 50·4 per cent. Plainly, that is totally unacceptable. What difference would it make if the base were 300,000 or 350,000 litres? We must discuss this, not just in terms of the proposed figures, but in terms of what we are trying to do. I shall return to that. Existing milk quotas in European Community countries, except for the United Kingdom, are too high and are resulting in overproduction of approximately 14 per cent.

Mr. McKelvey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Russell Johnston: I am pushed for time, but I shall give way and hope that the hon. Gentleman is brief.

Mr. McKelvey: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, when those figures are adjusted for Scotland, they will mean a 75 per cent. cut for Scottish farmers.

Sir Russell Johnston: That is a good point, and I accept it.

The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) drew attention not only to the livestock crisis in the hills, but to the difficulties faced by soft fruit growers. If the amendment that he and his hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) tabled had been selected, we would have supported it. He was right about the absence of forward thinking.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) spoke about indebtedness and the consequent impact of interest rates, as did the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), who was also properly concerned with farm wages. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) spoke knowledgeably about the erosion of the rural environment in Wales. The hon. Member for Lancaster felt that food should be produced economically and not romantically, but she favoured well-maintained dry stone dykes. Perhaps we are closer than the furious torrent of her words suggested.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South——

Rev. Ian Paisley: Antrim, North.

Sir Russell Johnston: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I am sure that he is always north of most of us. He rolled out in his thunderous way and rightly asked the Minster what on earth he proposes for the future. That is the key to the whole debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) was polite and over-fair to the Minister. Sadly, the Minister was himself—smooth tongued and glib and, as always, eager to make party politics and to obscure the principal issues in a plethora of words. He was much more anxious to spend time trying to make political capital than to address issues. The Minister cannot tell me or any of my hon. Friends that we have an easy time in politics or that we play at pretend politics and do not care for our constituents. I am a tolerant man and I am prepared to listen to his arguments, but I am not getting the chance to hear them. He should do me and my hon. Friends the decency of listening to us.

There is a considerable surplus in butter and beef. I am told that about 45 per cent. of the beef surplus is directly attributable to the customer response to BSE, mad cow disease.

Mr. Gummer *indicated dissent.*

Sir Russell Johnston: It is all very well for the Minister to shake his head, but that is what the NFU tells me, and that is the only criterion that I can use. The Minister did not mention mad cow disease, but if it is responsible for about 45 per cent. of the beef surplus in the Community, it is a substantial matter. What is being done about it, how much more is being spent on research and are we making any progress? That is an important and grave matter.

We have to contain production, reduce surpluses and, naturally, we have to contain public expenditure. We must enable rural economies to survive, and that will mean redirecting income, which is what MacSharry talks about. We must find a way through the GATT negotiations. As the hon. Member for Taunton perceptively observed, those things have to be done at a time when agriculture is less politically popular than it used to be. It is more under assault than it used to be and finds it more difficult to get a resonance from the public.

We do not pretend that the problems are easy to solve; nor do we say different things in different places. I should like to think that we are reasonable politicians and, as such, we should like to see a sensible, staged policy for the future. I accept that the MacSharry proposals are unacceptable, not just in the north of Ireland but in that other place which the hon. Member for Antrim, North would not normally mention.

The problem that MacSharry addresses will not go away. Extensification, set-aside and rural management schemes will all help, but there must be some transfer of income from the big to the small to maintain rural life while retaining the market spur. MacSharry has the right idea but the wrong figures. The Minister said about the MacSharry proposals:

"We hate them. We condemn them".

Those are not the words of a rational negotiator.

This has been a good debate and hon. Members have shown a deep concern for agriculture. The Government have not given agriculture sufficient priority in their thinking; nor have they been sufficiently clear about where they are going, and that is what farmers want to know.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): Almost all hon. Members agree that many farmers face difficult times. We know that that is true and that there is no point in pretending otherwise. Few people have given the reasons for that. A biblical plague of locusts has not descended from the sky. As the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) has said, the basic structural problem of over-production still exists

[Mr. David Curry]

in the Community. In many respects, there is over-production also in the world market. Until we tackle that, we will not put farm incomes right, because we cannot maintain everybody on the land producing food that people do not wish to eat. Until supply and demand can be brought closer together, it will be impossible to maintain incomes from the marketplace. If that cannot be done, little can be done to maintain incomes other than by aid and subsidy.

It is not the policy of this Government or any hypothetical Government to allow farmers to become the recipients of perennial social security payments merely because they are farmers. That would be wrong for this or any other Government. I have mentioned over-production, but we also know that there have been fundamental changes in patterns of consumption. BSE has been a problem in this country, but throughout the Community there is a decline in beef consumption. It may be a sociological trend, but it exists, and it started well before the BSE problem started in the United Kingdom.

There have been specific problems such as BSE, the drought, and early marketing of lambs because of the mild winters that we enjoyed until recently. There were problems also in the French and Irish markets, and because of the Gulf war, with the closing of middle east markets. In addition, output has been increasing, and this time there is not the blessed drought in the United States that helped us so much for a couple of years. World prices are declining, and the catastrophic fall in the value of the dollar has had an impact on the Community budget.

Neither farmers nor Governments can do much about those factors. Instead, we can only try to cope with them in the context of the Community. Where we can help, we do. That is why we increased the HLCA, and why it was so well received. We targeted it specifically at the most difficult sector—the uplands and the hardy breeds, which also received an increase last year. The forms were delayed because we were compelled to adopt a new scheme, which we opposed but which was forced upon us by the Community. Until we did that, we could not proceed to issue forms—but they are now all on their way. We will do the maximum we can to get payments to farmers as quickly as possible, because we know the urgency of the cash flow problems they face. I freely give that undertaking.

We also increased the suckler cow premium to the maximum, and developed a whole series of schemes to assist farms where possible. However, we must still apply a test of value for money. I repeat that we are not, and cannot be, in the business of turning the farmer into a recipient of social security purely because he is a farmer. That is at the heart of our objections to the MacSharry proposals—for it would have that effect on a whole category of farmers.

I admire the struggle of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) in trying to decide what parts of the MacSharry proposals he liked or disliked. But he said that he was trying, and we all like triers. We are all reasonable people on these Benches, and we have never abused Mr. MacSharry. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] We may have said one or two marginally critical things about his proposals, but there is a distinction to be drawn between Mr. MacSharry—the personality with whom we have to deal, day in, day out, and with whom our relations are impeccable—and his proposals, which we think are pretty bad for the United Kingdom.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and others reiterated their objections, and it helps us to know that the House is united in its opposition to the proposals. We need that influence and certainty in Brussels in arguing why we think that MacSharry's proposals are unfriendly to the United Kingdom. One reason is that they are fundamentally anti-commercial and anti-economic. One cannot engineer a flight from the marketplace. The quotas and controls implicit in the MacSharry proposals move away from the marketplace, and that does not make sense for farmers. Agricultural needs are best met by a policy that is organised around commercial operations that can survive in a market place. The proposals would also be expensive to implement. Curbing excessive expenditure by a large-scale programme of adding to the budget seems to us somewhat perverse.

The proposals also discriminate against the United Kingdom because of the price-tagging restraint that would have to be observed by United Kingdom farmers, and because they are selective in the product range that they cover, whereas the products of others that are seriously in surplus in the Community are not even touched by the MacSharry proposals.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber mentioned small farms. We should not romanticise about them. Many people are getting out of farming on the continent, where there is a problem of diversification. We do not have that problem in the United Kingdom, as I know from my own constituency. I will take lessons from no one on the problems of small farmers and farming. The problem in my Pennine constituency is not farmers trying to get out, but people trying to get planning permission to convert the barn and to live in it.

We object also to the attempt to keep pocket farms in existence beyond any reasonable test of viability. We are not opposed to the small farm. When we had 1 per cent. of milk quota to distribute, my right hon. Friend the Minister and myself decided to give a little over the odds to the smaller farmer to help him to survive. We sought also to introduce a new entrants scheme to help people who wanted to move into the industry. We have introduced our proposals on tenancies to help the smaller or younger farmer to get into the industry.

We will not take it from anybody that we have an ideological hostility to the small farm. Instead, we believe that the small British farm should not pay for the pocket farm elsewhere. That is not only wrong, but a futile policy. A farm of 40 cows, which will produce roughly 200,000 litres, is a fairly small one for the United Kingdom and for other parts of the Community. Even some people in the Republic of Ireland would regard it as a small-scale farm. The small or family farm would undoubtedly be hit by the MacSharry proposals, and there would be precious few beneficiaries in the United Kingdom from the pocket farm approach that appears to be at the heart of them.

It is true that we must work to find allies in the Council, and that we must respond to its proposals. The Commission has the sole right to initiate legislation, and we realised from the start that coalition building is the name of the game. We have been very successful in that. We were at the heart of the rational opposition to the MacSharry proposals because we managed to persuade others to come to our side.

Despite much of the rhetoric surrounding small farmers, when they were faced with the choice of opting for the commercial farm capable of delivering to the market place or for the nostalgic concept of peasantry, they decided that their national interests were best served by the commercial farm concept. That was the day when the bluff was called.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) made an important speech. He will excuse me if I refer to the intervention made in his speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), who I think was disappointed not to be called. He referred to the cereal acreage increase and to set-aside. British cereal acreage fell by 173,000 hectares in one year, and by 30,000 hectares the previous year. Since we introduced set-aside in Britain, there has been a decline in the cereal acreage. That philosophy has not been applied with anything like equal vigour on the continent.

The set-aside may turn out to be one of the pivotal ideas in the reformed MacSharry proposals. One of our pivotal ideas is to ensure that, whatever new law the Community makes, it becomes the law for everyone. Laws should apply equally across the Community, and burdens should be fairly shared.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Minister has explained why he does not like the MacSharry proposals, and the right hon. Gentleman said why he does not like our proposals. Nor does the Minister like the NFU's proposals on production control. In what direction do the Government want to go?

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, and if I have time, I will give him that explanation. The Government have set out their ideas on changing the CAP. They embrace a wide concept, but the essence is that there must be a move closer to the marketplace.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman does not say how.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) spoke of slavish adherence to the free market. Anyone who has to run a part of the CAP will find it slightly curious to be accused of that. We would like to see a little more slavery from the rest when it comes to a free market. The hon. Gentleman said also that there should also be direct income aid. That is a horrendous proposition, if one multiplies it across the Community. There followed a series of happy little phrases, one of which was sensitive management. That was not very specific in helping farmers to comprehend the prospects of a Labour Government.

We think it important to operate closer to the market place. We see a role for specific aid for farmers—well tested and well costed—when there is a countryside function for them to preform. We see a role for certain restraints on output, which we may well find ourselves obliged to observe under the GATT. That is an important element for our farmers as well as all the others; the alternative is an horrendous trade war.

Those are coherent and long-standing policies, which remain valid and which we will defend. The Liberal motion is woolly, wordy and worthy, and is not worth a row of beans. I am disappointed to learn that the great party of Gladstone has surrendered to dirigisme and bureaucracy. I regret it, and the party will regret it, and I ask the House to reject the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 46, Noes 141.

Division No. 66] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Livsey, Richard
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morley, Elliot
O'Hara, Edward
Paisley, Rev Ian
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Ronnie Fearn.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Butler, Chris
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moynihan, Hon Colin

Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nell Hamilton and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 300 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes Her Majesty's Government's intention to negotiate in Brussels so as to secure changes to the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community which make it more market-oriented, thereby giving an incentive to efficiency, reduce surpluses, thereby lessening tensions in international trade, keep spending within the agricultural guideline, avoid discrimination against United Kingdom interests, and integrate environmental considerations more firmly into the Policy; and recognises that such a stance is necessary to take proper account of the interests of taxpayers and consumers while offering a realistic prospect of a successful future for British farming.

Fishing Industry

7.12 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to move.

That this House condemns Her Majesty's Government for presiding over a crisis in the fishing industry which threatens the economic and social fabric of fishing communities throughout the United Kingdom; condemns in particular the compulsory tie up scheme and the Government's continuing refusal to promote structural support through the implementation of a well targeted decommissioning scheme; and calls upon the Government to pursue, with greater vigour, measures to combat industrial fishing and technical conservation measures including the adoption of square mesh panels, and to enter into discussions with representatives of the fishing industry for the purpose of devising a decommissioning scheme which will lead to a managed reduction in fleet capacity.

Those who take an interest in the fishing industry will have little doubt about the serious crisis of confidence in the industry. The eight-day tie-up may have given fishermen and their representatives a focus for their wrath and frustration, but even if the Minister were to surprise us greatly and announce this evening that he intended to renounce the scheme, I am sure that he would agree that the fishing industry's problems would not go away. This debate provides us with an important opportunity to discuss the serious issues that face the industry.

No fishing industry debate has taken place since the vital Council of Ministers meeting in December. The industry is vital in economic terms to many coastal communities, particularly in those areas where other opportunities for employment are in short supply. Therefore, my right hon. and hon. Friends thought it appropriate to bring on to the Floor of the House our great concern about the future health of the fishing industry. We are conscious of the damage that could be done to the social and economic fabric of fishing communities if the malaise is not adequately dealt with. We do so, too, in the hope that Ministers, who have it in their power to improve matters, will listen to the debate and respond to it.

The Minister will no doubt draw attention to the fact that at the Council of Ministers meeting in December he managed to obtain continued recognition of the United Kingdom's claims under the Hague preference and improved flexibility with regard to taking our western mackerel quota east of the 4 deg W line. The Government ought to be congratulated. I have no quarrel with those aspects which are referred to in the Government amendment.

I suspect that we shall also hear from the Minister, as we did from Fisheries Ministers throughout 1990, that although catch opportunities and total allowable catches have been reduced, the price of fish landed has increased and fishermen's income has not necessarily declined. That ought to be put in its proper context. Even in 1990, in absolute terms fishermen's incomes were below those in 1987. In real terms, they were even further below those in 1987.

The price that a fisherman gets for his landings is only one very small part of the tale. We should also consider the return that he is or is not getting on his capital and the high rates of interest he has to pay on his borrowings, due to the Government's failed economic policies. In recent months, he has also had to face the increased cost of fuel, after oil

prices rose so sharply following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In *Fishing News* of 1 February there was a report that already there are signs of landings prices beginning to fall. I hope that the Government will not take refuge behind the wafer-thin excuse that they parroted throughout 1990—that prices are being maintained, or are even higher, and that therefore incomes are not falling.

We do not believe that the eight-day rule should be the be all and end all of the debate. Had it been called, I should have welcomed the amendment tabled by the Scottish National party. I hope that the debate will not be seen as a substitute for a very full debate of the statutory instrument and the prayer against it dealing with the eight-day tie-up, which will have to be amended in the light of yesterday's announcement.

Considerable wrath and ill feeling have been generated throughout the industry by the tie-up. According to recent editions of *Fishing News*, in my constituency Mr. John Goodlad, the secretary of the Shetland Fishermen's Federation, has described the proposals as "unjust and unfair". On 8 February, skipper Tom Watson of Fleetwood said in *Fishing News* that it was the last nail in the coffin and that

"This Government doesn't want a fishing industry, that's for sure."

Skipper David Hunt of Lowestoft was reported in *Fishing News* of 25 January as saying:

"Many more will be forced out until there are only a few left, who will then be disregarded, and Mr. Gummer will receive an accolade from his colleagues for a job well done."

Skipper Jim Vanko of Eyemouth said:

"I wonder how MPs and officials would like their salaries to be reduced and the resultant financial savings squandered? This government has prided itself on encouraging initiative and private investment, yet every way the industry turns our feet are knocked from beneath us."

That is a selection of comments from different parts of the country which demonstrate the outrage that the proposal has caused.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well aware of the fact that the proposal will be a tragedy for Northern Ireland. Last year, the whiting catch amounted to 7,395 tonnes. That catch is to be reduced to 2,300 tonnes. The cod catch, which was 6,330 tonnes, is to be reduced to 1,200 tonnes. Northern Ireland's fishing industry entirely agrees with the sentiments expressed in the hon. Gentleman's quotations, as, I am sure, do other members of the fishing industry in other parts of the country—that, if it comes into effect, the proposal will devastate and finish off the industry.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman voices the concerns of his fishing constituents very well. The proposal is causing concern throughout the United Kingdom. I am pleased to see that so many hon. Members with constituencies throughout the United Kingdom are present for the debate.

During the debate on 14 December, it was clear that the Government supported the compulsory tie-up. Initially, it was for 10 days. After the Council of Ministers meeting, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) told the House that he had secured a major concession and that the 10 days were to be reduced to eight. If that is victory to the Minister, heaven help us in defeat. Many people found it a negligible concession which would not make any material difference to the fundamental problem.

There are several objections in principle to the provision. It will put pressure on skippers to put to sea against their better judgment, when weather conditions would make it far safer for them to stay in their home port. There is no guarantee that the eight days in the month during which they choose to tie up will coincide with the eight days of bad weather. The pressure to go out and to earn the livelihood that is being denied them for one third of the month will be far greater. Regrettably, too regularly in the House we mourn the loss of lives in fishing accidents. We do not want that to happen as a result of the regulations. The fishermen themselves are expressing the fear that they may have to put to sea in bad conditions.

There will be damage to the social life of the communities. I recall that, when he came back from the most recent meeting of the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food told us that one of the important achievements of managing to reduce the 10 days to eight was that it would allow those who had strong religious beliefs to continue to practise their religion and not to have to go to sea on a Sunday. He will no doubt by now be in receipt of a letter from the Presbytery of Shetland which says:

"In an attempt to compensate for being tied up for eight consecutive days every month, fishermen will inevitably begin to fish at weekends. Traditional family weekend activities, including church attendance, and way of life will therefore be put at risk within many small fishing communities around the entire coast of Scotland."

I know that the Minister is a man of profound religious conviction. I hope that he will ponder the effect of the rule on many communities in Scotland, in England and in Northern Ireland.

It is also fair to point out that there must be a question mark over whether the proposal will have the desired effect. The remaining days will be used to fish ever more intensively. We may find that fishermen are going through all the agonies, dangers and disruptions to their social life for no net benefit in terms of conservation. Next year, the Government and the Commission may have to think up another new rule to try to limit fishing activity.

We also have objections of detail. Skippers may have difficulty in crewing vessels when they are unable to offer continuous employment throughout the month, especially in Grampian in the north-east of Scotland, where other industries, such as the oil industry, offer attractive terms and a greater continuity of work.

Share fishermen will also be affected. The rules of the Department of Social Security will still mean that, if the eight days overlap two weeks, share fishermen will not be entitled to claim unemployment benefit, although they have paid a special stamp. In recent correspondence, the Department has shown no intention of relaxing the rules for those circumstances.

A skipper in Westray in my constituency pointed out to me today that, if he is to land his catch at Mallaig, he cannot bring his boat back to Orkney without it counting towards his eight days, even though he may do no fishing en route. It was described to me by another representative of the industry as tantamount to a curfew rather than a tie-up. With the level of fines that are imposed, it is highly unlikely that anyone will try to fish if they want to take a boat back from Aberdeen to Shetland. Fishermen will not fish if they cannot land their catch, and the minute they have landed their catch, it will be perfectly obvious to everyone that they have broken the rules and they will land

[Mr. Wallace]

up with a hefty fine. I appeal to the Minister. If the regulations are to stay in place, I hope that some practical adjustment can be made to take account of such cases.

It has been pointed out to me that boats will tend to congregate in the bigger ports because they cannot get back to their home port. That may damage the economy of the smaller ports because there will not be work on run-of-the-mill repairs or maintenance. Log jams could occur at the bigger ports because too many boats may seek maintenance there.

Yesterday's derogation, and the concession, if that is what it is, that if vessels carry only long lines or have a net mesh size equal to or greater than 110 mm, with or without a 100 mm square mesh panel, has been welcomed by some sections of the industry. However, the Minister is over-egging it if he says that the concession has the full support of the industry. The English fishermen from the Humber and from the south and east coasts will find it a useful concession. Many of my constituents in Shetland will find it a useful concession because it will bring them a fair measure of relief. However, it does little or nothing for most of the Scottish fleet. It does little or nothing for, for example, the fishermen in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

We are entitled to ask the Minister whether he has any proposals for dealing with their continuing dilemma. Is he trying to divide the industry? The industry may already be divided within ports between the boats that are tied up under the rules and those that are not. That may not be secured by design, but it is quite convenient to have the industry divided on geographical lines. The Minister cannot do something for one part of the industry while ignoring the other. We shall be interested to hear what ideas he has for bringing similar relief to a large part of the Scottish fleet.

It is also fair to say that, although parts of the English industry welcome the concession, they do not do so gladly. It is a bit like a person who has been given a death sentence being told that it has been commuted to life imprisonment. Fishermen are worried that we are setting a precedent which could be extended to other parts of the country and to other species. The adoption of the 110 mm mesh size together with the 100 mm square panel might be seen by Mr. Marin and Commission officials as a signal of an acceptable regime to introduce at a future date. All sections of the industry would be opposed to that.

I have said that the eight-day tie-up rule is not the whole story. We have been landed with it because the United Kingdom Government have done little to take other measures to reduce the size of the fleet or to reduce catches. The Commission has been obliged to come in with measures such as this.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I want to make a point before the hon. Gentleman leaves the specifics of the eight-day tie-up. Does he agree that, although the Government appear anxious to describe the scheme as a European initiative, the Secretary of State for Scotland, in the fisheries debate in the House in December, described these incredible measures as sensible?

Mr. Wallace: I always think twice before acceding to an invitation from the hon. Gentleman to agree with him, but on this occasion I must say that I do agree.

All parties agree that the future of the industry depends on a conservation policy. Although it recognised the difficulties, especially after the large cut in the haddock total allowable catch for 1989, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation put forward in the late spring of 1989 a package of technical conservation measures. It included having a clean and effective minimum mesh size of 90 mm with no attachments or devices, whether legitimate or illegitimate, and a one-net rule, so that someone could not fish for white fish using a prawn net. The fishermen also suggested a ban on industrial fishing, an increase in the minimum landing size of whiting and more enforcement powers for fisheries officers on shore.

The debate tends to have become bogged down in mesh sizes. I am not saying that that is not important. The debate has also focused on the square mesh panel. However, we are entitled to ask what happened to some of the other measures. Have they been argued through at European Council meetings? Why not? What has happened to the one-net rule? Perhaps the Minister could report on how he has got on while trying to push that argument.

The objective behind all the measures, especially the square mesh panel, is to conserve stocks and to reduce the discards which many of us agree are one of the most appalling examples of waste. Fish are caught, yet cannot be landed and are dumped back dead into the sea. The square mesh panel and the different mesh size would lead to fishing for better quality and for a better size of fish, which is important for marketing.

The big hole in the Government's approach is their refusal to adopt—or even start to consider and discuss with the industry—a decommissioning policy. We are familiar with the arguments against it. We have heard—and no doubt we shall hear again tonight—that, in the mid-1980s, the Public Accounts Committee rapped the Government's knuckles. My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who hopes to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker—is a member of the Public Accounts Committee. I am sure that he will confirm that there was no opposition to decommissioning in principle and that the opposition was to a particular scheme.

We have also been told that a decommissioning scheme will not make any difference—that we will not be able to get the right boats out of the fleet. If the Government say that, they are giving up before they have even started trying. The industry is willing to discuss decommissioning. I am sure that it would not be impossible for Ministers to discuss the matter with the industry and to try to devise a well targeted scheme so that the fleet size can be reduced in a well managed way.

We are then told about the Fontainebleau agreement. I shall not go into the details of that, because it is rather complicated. As I understand it, although on the face of it a decommissioning scheme would involve a 70 per cent. contribution from the Community and a 30 per cent. contribution from the Exchequer, it is argued that, as a result of the Fontainebleau agreement, the contribution would amount to 30 per cent. from the Community and roughly 70 per cent. from the Exchequer. That conveniently ignores the tax implications for the fishermen. It seems that the Government are prepared to play with the figures one way but not to think the implications through.

Hon. Members will recall that the Fontainebleau agreement was a great diplomatic triumph for the former Prime Minister. Surely it is not the fishing industry's fault if, once the details have been worked out, the agreement is not quite as triumphal as it was made out to be at the time. Why should the fishing industry be singled out for discrimination? Why should the Fontainebleau agreement be invoked to deprive them of the opportunity to receive benefits that the European Community wishes them to have?

It is important to note that the common fisheries policy has two strands—the conservative side and the structures side. It is clear that the Commission intends to boost the structures side through decommissioning and by giving assistance to areas that depend on the fishing industry to help them to cope with the reduction in stocks. What we have from the Government is the worst of all worlds. Our fishing communities are penalised by the reduction in stocks, but they are receiving very few of the benefits on the structures sides of the policy. We have never yet had a convincing answer from the Government as to why that should be.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): My hon. Friend will agree that there is an important third strand to Europe's policy on fishing, which is that it recognises national interests through the quotas allocated to the member nations in the various sectors. In that respect, the action of the Spanish fishermen in coming in to our waters and using our quota is devastating to fishermen who are struggling in all the ways that my hon. Friend has described. Certainly in my part of the world, the position that the Government adopt on that will be as important as any other element to fishermen's future.

Mr. Wallace: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's concern for his area. I know that the problem is particularly acute in the waters around the south-west, where there is already evidence of Spanish vessels coming in. If the Government had built up more credit with the Commission over the years, rather than being seen to rubbish proposals such as that for health warnings on cigarette packets, they would have been able to bat on better ground when it came to a clear issue of national interest such as this.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): Pathetic.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister may say that it is pathetic, but the Government have lost the battle and the Minister has given us no indication of how he proposes to defend the national interest. Fishing quotas are different from other aspects of Community policy. There is not a single market. National interests are identified and accepted; indeed, they are the sum and substance of quotas and TACs. The Minister will have to come up with something better than that sedentary remark. He failed to tell us his policy in the farming debate and he ought to do a little better this time.

There are signs that the Commission and those advising it see a need for further cuts in the size and capacity of the European Community fleet. The figure of 40 per cent. has been mentioned. Does the Minister recognise that figure? If the figure is to be anything approaching 40 per cent., how do the Government intend to reduce the capacity of the British fleet? Surely it cannot be through bankruptcy and insolvency——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Of course it is.

Mr. Wallace: It is true that that is what is happening, but surely that cannot be a sound or sensible way of going about things, even if it is the Government's way. Why will not the Government face up to their responsibilities and try to find a way in which the process can be properly managed? One young fisherman told me today that he saw little chance of being able to replace his 20-year-old vessel with something better. The Government argue that they are trying to conserve stocks for the fishermen of the future. But there will be no fishing industry in future if they kill it off by the measures that they are introducing. Of course conservation is important, but so is the survival of the industry. The Minister will have to do a lot better than he has done in recent debates if he is to convince us that the Government take the survival of the industry seriously.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I must tell the House that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister but not the amendment standing in the name of members of the Scottish National party.

7.36 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'while recognising the difficulties which may face fishermen as a result of the decisions for fish conservation reached at the latest EC Council of Fisheries Ministers, endorses the need for such measures to safeguard the long-term interests of fishermen themselves by reducing the over-exploitation of certain fish stocks, welcomes the Government's continuing efforts to secure improved conservation measures and congratulates the Government on securing at the last Fisheries Council a package of measures which included the maintenance of the principle of relative stability, continued recognition of the United Kingdom's claims under the Hague Preference and improved flexibility to take our western mackerel quota east of 4° West.'

If we were still debating agriculture, I might say that I fear that we have shot the fox of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). Perhaps I should say instead that we have landed his fish. The hon. Gentleman said that he would have adopted the Scottish National party's amendment had he had an opportunity to do so, and the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) said the same in respect of the farming debate. Perhaps the two parties should get together and become one small party instead of two minuscule parties.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Minister now tell us whether the Ministry will enable the House to debate the statutory instrument referred to in our amendment?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Lady has been in the House long enough to know that Government Departments do not determine the business of the House. Nevertheless, I am perfectly happy to debate that, or anything else, with the hon. Lady. I am perfectly confident that, following such a debate, the Government's position will be shown to be

[Mr. Curry]

convincing and her position will be shown to be ephemeral. I should therefore be delighted to debate the matter with her.

Let me address certain specific and important issues, the first of which is the eight-day tie-up. The origin of that was the scientific advice given to the Commission. That advice was that there had to be a 30 per cent. cut in effort. I did not invent the tie-up, and neither did any of my right hon. or hon. Friends. The orginal proposal was for a 10-day tie-up, along with 120 mm nets, together catching boats 40 per cent. of whose catch comprised cod and haddock. We negotiated on that; indeed, we had no option but to do so.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I cannot follow the logic of the Minister's argument. How can the fishing effort be reduced by tying up for 10 days—now eight days—vessels that trigger the 40 per cent. rule when vessels that are not covered by it can go out as much as they like? How does that reduce the effort?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman should address his question to the Commission, because the Commission is the origin of the proposal, which we contested. We got the proposal improved. If the hon. Gentleman waits a minute, I will tell him what we have done. We managed to reduce the proposal to an eight-day tie-up.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: I have given way twice already and I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman shortly so he need not fret.

We negotiated a tie-up for any period of eight days to apply to vessels which between 1 January 1989 and 30 June 1990 caught more than 100 tonnes of cod and haddock —we introduced that element for the North sea, the west of Scotland and Rockall—and whose catches of the species were more than 40 per cent. of the total landings in weight over the period. That applies broadly speaking, to 75 English and Welsh boats and about 390 Scottish boats. Collectively, those boats were responsible for about three quarters of the United Kingdom catch of the total quota of the species.

I sought from the Commission an undertaking that if we could make an alternative proposal based on selective gear, which would have the equivalent effect, it would entertain that proposal. It took a great deal of effort to get the Commission to agree even to look at such proposals. We obtained the undertaking only at the very end of the day—in the last minute of the negotiations. Since then, my officials have been working hard to put forward those proposals.

Mr. Salmond: From what the Minister says, he has no great belief in the eight-day continuous tie-up. Can we take it that he renounces the view of the Secretary of State for Scotland, expressed in the debate in December, that it was "a sensible measure"? Does the Minister accept that, although the 110 mm option may have some relevance for the English fleet and for some fleets in Orkney and Shetland, for the vast majority of Scottish boats affected by the eight-day continuous tie-up, the 110 mm mesh size is not a serious option?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman lives in a remarkable world. In his world, there are no conservation problems. It is a Yeatsian world, in which the seas are teeming with fish.

There is a conservation problem, and it must be addressed. Last year, we had a limitation on days of fishing. The rule was broken practically universally. We must have measures which are effective in cutting effort and are enforceable. The virtue of a tie-up rule, whether hon. Members like it or not, is that it is enforceable and cuts the effort.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Before he moves on, perhaps the Minister could clarify the matter. The Labour party does not follow the populist line pursued by others of saying that there is no conservation problem and nothing needs to be done. But the Minister must give a better answer than that which he gave to my hon. Friend the member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). My hon. Friend did not deny that there was a conservation problem, but he asked whether the tie-up would address that problem. He asked whether it was inevitable or even likely that it would lead to a reduction in effort. The Minister's response was extraordinary. He said, "Don't ask the Government, ask the Commission. It is all the Commission's fault." Is that really the Government's position?

Mr. Curry: That is not what I said. I said that the Commission was the origin of the proposals and that the British Government believed that a tie-up would be effective in cutting effort. But the 10-day proposal went too far, just as the 120 mm net proposal went too far. As I have said in the House time after time, we have two intentions. We must conserve fish stocks but we must also conserve the livelihoods of fishermen. The two are equally important because without one, we cannot have the other, we must have that double objective.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: This is the last time.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Minister saying that, if the measures do not prove effective in reducing fishing effort, he and the Government will be prepared to see the number of days increased?

Mr. Curry: I am saying that we must apply the rules as they have been set by the Community for this year. As I am about to describe, we have some proposals on conservation which we believe will help the position.

We must also deal with technical conservation at a Community level. I was as disappointed as anyone else at the December Council that we could not take greater measures. For the information of hon. Members, I should say that a further Council has been fixed for 16 April to deal with our proposals and those of Commissioner Marin on capacity.

I congratulate my officials, who worked hard to construct our proposal. To be fair, the Commission officials were also helpful and constructive. As Commissioner Marin is a gentleman about whom I have had to say some hard things in the past, I also put it on record that he was co-operative and helpful on the gear option. I hope that we can maintain a constructive and

civilised relationship with him. He has the job and we must deal with him and work out sensible proposals with his help. In this case, it has worked.

The gear option is as follows. Fishermen will be able to use long lines. They will have to use 110 mm diamond shape mesh size nets, with or without the 100 mm square mesh panel. We shall apply a one-net rule so that boats can carry only that net and there is no doubt about the effectiveness of the option. We shall also add rules to stop the ballooning of the cod end and ban lifting bags and topside chafers. All those are elements of the proposal from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, referred to by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). We have taken its suggestions on board and we regard many elements as extremely sensible.

I shall table an amendment to the statutory instrument within the next few days incorporating the gear option, which will apply in legal terms from 1 March. But where vessels are clearly in a position to operate under it from an earlier date, I shall be willing to see them do so. In other words, we shall be sensible and pragmatic about the application of that rule.

There was never a chance of agreeing on a gear option of less than 110 mm. Other countries are also going for the gear option. To my knowledge, they have not yet obtained it. We are the first off the blocks with the gear option. Other countries also asked for the 110 mm mesh size. It was important that we kept our act together and asked for the same thing. The co-operation that we have established with other countries has been helpful.

I do not seek to conceal the fact that some fishermen will not find the gear option advantageous. I do not pretend that it will be received with universal cries of glee. Where whiting is an important element in the catch, some boats will not take the option. For such boats, the tie-up rules must remain, because they are now the law of the land. There will be an effect on the fishing effort. I make it clear that we shall enforce those rules. In our discussions on a whole series of issues in Brussels, not least the future of the common fisheries policy, a great part of our credibility stems from the fact that we enforce the rules. In a recent communication from Commissioner Marin, only one country in the Community was not criticised for its enforcement effort and that was the United Kingdom. That is of material advantage to us in Brussels.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Minister take on board what is happening in Northern Ireland? I know that he is aware that the fishing industry there is small and employs only about 2,500 people. But if the quotas which are being negotiated are applied, the entire industry will be devastated. Will he consider that?

Mr. Curry: I will certainly take it on board. I shall deal shortly with certain problems in the Irish sea, in which the hon. Gentleman will be interested.

I have taken several interventions. I know that many hon. Members wish to speak so, if I may, I shall be more expeditious from now on so that I can get through my speech.

It is important that the producer organisations phase their catching over the year. That is part of the deal that we have done with Brussels. My officials will be in touch with the organisations to make sure that the fishery stretches across the year. That is also important for all sorts of sensible reasons, such as the guarantee of supply.

There is a conservation problem for cod and haddock. There is a specific problem in the North sea and the west coast of Scotland. In the Irish sea there is a specific problem for cod and whiting. As I have said, the December Council was disappointing, but we have taken on board some of the work done by the fishing organisations. I pay tribute to their work. One element that was never a starter was a proposal that the net size should be 90 mm diameter with an 80 mm panel. I have made it clear in the past and I make it clear again that it was never going to carry the day. It is far too minimalist to be able to carry the day in Scotland.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): Will the Minister give way on that specific point?

Mr. Curry: No. I am addressing the specific point.

I have said in the past that, if one is serious about conservation, when the present rules are based on a 90 mm diameter diamond mesh, it is not credible to suggest that the principal measure of control should be a 90 mm mesh with merely an 80 mm panel. I do not deny that there would be conservation benefits, but they would not be sufficient.

Mr. Doran: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No. I am not giving way further, because I do not want to eat up other people's time.

The conservation priorities and the importance of conservation led us to contemplate unilateral action. That is why we have gone out to consultation, which will finish at the end of this week, on the introduction of a 90 mm mesh with a 90 mm panel, which will have a commensurately greater benefit. The object of that is principally to benefit haddock. There is a big year class of haddock out there and it is important to ensure that the stock is not pounded.

If people are serious about conservation, I hope that they will welcome the proposals. We are serious about conservation, and one cannot have conservation and everyone's traditional fishing patterns simultaneously. The two do not go together. It is important to be serious about conservation. We cannot wait for ever in the hope that we shall get some sort of decision out of Brussels, when we know how intolerably slow it is to reach agreement in the Council of Ministers. We cannot see our stocks simply keel over while we are still arguing about the number of boats——

Mr. Doran *rose*——

Mr. Curry: No, I have already said that I shall not give way. I have been generous in accepting interventions.

Some people will criticise the unilateral character of the proposals, but we have 87 per cent. of the North sea haddock stock and 80 per cent. of the west coast haddock stock. The fishery is predominantly ours, and responsibility for conserving it is predominantly in our hands. If we decide to go ahead after the consultations, we shall probably apply the changes from 1 July.

We are also proposing a 70 mm square panel in a 70 mm mesh in the prawn and nephrops fishery, to cut the by-catch of small fish. We are out to save the small haddock, as many of them are caught in that fishery. I understand that some Scottish organisations would be willing to see a larger panel size in the nephrops fishery and we shall look at any such proposals sympathetically to see

[Mr. Curry]

if we can go further than our current proposals. It is important to ensure that that young year class of haddock grows to maturity.

There is a conservation problem in the Irish sea. That is an area where, frankly, in the past we have invented fish for political reasons. The allowable catches have been kept too high and politics has overruled science. We are still arguing in the Council that we should take the mesh sizes from 70 mm to 80 mm. We shall continue to press for that.

There is another issue that I should like to mention, because I know that hon. Gentlemen will be interested——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: And Ladies.

Mr. Curry: I have no doubt that hon. Ladies will be especially interested. It relates to the Irish sea fishery for cod, haddock and saithe. We have now decided on the basis of the allocation for the 1991 track records. We have concluded that the 1990 track record is not a reliable basis for the allocation of entitlement. Therefore, the allocations will be based on the track records in the years 1987, 1988 and 1989.

On the distant water fishery——

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Curry: Very well.

Mr. Harris: I am pleased to hear what my hon. Friend has said about the track record. Does that mean that the way is now clear for the introduction of sectoral quotas in the south-west in particular? My hon. Friend will be aware that it was the unreliability of those track records—they were based on cheating by certain elements of the fleet—that impacted on the introduction of such sectoral quotas.

Mr. Curry: I was careful in the phraseology I used to explain why we had decided to proceed on the said basis. I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that it is much more prudent for me to retain that phraseology; I shall deal with his detailed question by correspondence so that I can give him the reassurance he seeks.

The distant water fishery will be of interest to Humberside. We shall shortly announce the allocations in the Greenland waters, which will be significantly better than the entitlements of last year. That should assist the fleet in that area, which, in all fairness, suffered most of all from the 200-mile limits and the closure of the traditional distant deep sea water fishery.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) asked about quota hoppers. He will know that we are in the thick of a European Court case on this and the pleas have been made to the Advocate-General in the Factortame case. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have fought this case vigorously and we are still fighting it. A number of European countries have supported us, and the Germans made an oral presentation in our support.

As the case is under way, I do not want to comment on it, but it is our intention that we should be able to sort this matter out on a basis that maintains for the United Kingdom, the principle of direction and control from the United Kingdom, as that is extremely important.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: There is a clear national interest involved, and Ministers have argued that in the case before the courts. I welcome the overseas support we have received. Can the Minister say whether a resolution of the matter will soon be reached?

Mr. Curry: We settled certain issues with the Spanish interests rather than pursuing those matters through the courts, because we felt that we could do so in an advantageous way for the United Kingdom. I am confident that we have a substantial case in our favour regarding Factortame that resides in the essential principles of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, and that is what my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General has been defending in the European Court. Our case has the sympathy of a number of member states, because they recognise the problem.

It is fair to say that, when the Community devised the common fisheries policy, it intended that a major management responsibility should remain with the member states. We believe that that is by far the most sensible way in which to run the policy. We want to continue in that manner after the review year of that policy.

Let me make it clear now, as I have made it clear umpteen times in the past, that our objection to decommissioning has nothing to do with the Public Accounts Committee. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland knows that I have made that clear many times. Our objections have nothing to do with the Committee's criticisms of the previous scheme. I have said that ad infinitum in the past, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

We object to decommissioning, because we do not believe that it represents value for money. It is not the best way in which to tackle the problems in the fisheries. It considers the problem from the point of view of tonnage rather than catching capacity, which varies dramatically between vessels. We would not necessarily catch the vessels exerting the greatest pressure on the stocks. The motion talks about targeting, but does one target the vessels that make the least catching effort, which would be expensive, or the most effective vessels, which would be a funny way in which to run a scheme? If one took the most effective and modern boats out of service, it would be difficult to justify one's wish for a modern and effective fleet in the future.

One could take out some boats judged on capacity. If one were willing to spend hundreds of millions, one could take out a measurable capacity, but the remaining boats would then increase their efforts. Therefore, one would risk the imposition of a whole new raft of restrictions and regulations to stop that happening.

We believe that there are better ways of going about decommissioning. We should try to free up a rigid and deterministic, monolithic system in the fisheries. We have already introduced measures on capacity aggregation that will particularly help the producer organisations. We have made other proposals to the industry about the ability to amalgamate entitlements. We want a constructive and sensible debate with the industry on that. I am willing to enter such discussions, but the industry must be willing to see a freer, more market-oriented system——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Market forces.

Mr. Curry: No, I said a "market-oriented system"; there is a deep distinction between the two.

The industry representatives cannot just say that they want a system based on decommissioning alone. We are

renegotiating the multi-annual guidance programme targets at the Commission's request to move to a system of registered tonnage. It is not our idea, but everyone else has undertaken that practice. We hope to be able to reach a conclusion on that. Hon. Members who now argue that our fleet is a long way from target may have to rework some of their arithmetic when we reach agreement.

In 1990, there was a small reduction of 3 per cent. in the size of the registered fleet. We do not know whether that is a blip or a trend, but, clearly, it would be helpful if it were a trend. We have tightened the licensing rules to limit increases in the number of vessels and to prevent increasing capacity.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister has spoken about the difficulty of targeting. Does he accept that the industry is willing to discuss how an effective, targeted decommission scheme could be introduced? The Minister, in common with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, should at least have the courtesy to "rule nothing in and rule nothing out", and he should talk to industry representatives on that specific matter.

Mr. Curry: I have talked frequently to the industry on a range of matters. I think that the industry will accept that my door is and always has been open. Decommissioning is not and will not be our policy. There are better ways of going about it. I am willing to discuss those with the industry and I want to have a sensible discussion about them.

It is not all gloom in fishing. There is a specific crisis involving cod and haddock. We have to take action, and we will not shirk it. I will not fall into the trap laid by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland of saying that earnings are escalating and that there is no problem. Of course there are problems for fishermen when opportunities decrease. The position is more buoyant than that of the farming industry which we discussed in the previous debate.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My hon. Friend suggested other methods apart from decommissioning to help reduce the size of fleets. If they are not effective and if we do not get decreases in the size of fleets in areas where we want to see them, will he reconsider a decommissioning scheme?

Mr. Curry: I would want to see evidence of the fishing industry's willingness to engage in a sensible discussion of the proposals that we have made. I have been asked whether I am willing to meet the industry to discuss decommissioning. I should like the industry to come to see me to discuss our proposals.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby) *rose*——

Mr. Curry: I am not giving way. I am almost at the end of my speech. I have had rather a long innings and it is my second innings of the day. Like the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), I am not getting double time.

The motion is silly. There is a crisis of over-fishing, but there is not one word in the motion about discipline or about the fact that the industry has to exercise discipline itself; there is not one word about the taxpayer, or about the marketplace, or about the reality of EC negotiations. The motion is opportunistic, weak and irrelevant. I urge my hon. Friends to reject it.

8 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the continuing crisis in the fishing industry. I appreciate the points made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). I was in Shetland last year, when I spoke to John Goodlad, of the Shetland Fishermen's Association. I appreciated the discussions that I had with him. I thought that his proposals and his attitude said a great deal for the responsibility of fishermen for their own industry and their concern for it.

As in the previous debate, apart from the background issues, prevailing economic policy has a bearing. Fishermen are affected by high interest rates and suffer pressure because of the markets in which they have to compete without support. The Labour party does not see the debate as a substitute for a debate on the statutory instrument which proposes the eight-day rule and which is being prayed against by the Leader of the Opposition and my hon. Friends.

The major factors facing fishermen are linked with a need for conservation. We do not disagree with the action that has to be taken to protect fish stocks and to ensure that we have a sustainable industry, but it is becoming ever clearer that conservation measures cannot be separated from structural measures in dealing with those objectives.

The Minister's recent announcement that boats will have the option, apart from the eight-day lie-up, of using 110 mm mesh may have got him off the hook, so to speak, in respect of the great injustice that was being done to boats which traditionally had larger mesh sizes, even larger than the 120 mm mesh for which the Commission was asking. I accept that boats pursuing a mixed fishery still have a major problem. I add my voice to the comments of the Scottish mixed fishery, which has suggested a series of measures, including the one-net rule and tighter control. It has acted responsibly and rationally, and it wants to work with the Ministry.

It is unfair to rule completely out of hand, as the Minister appeared to do, the proposal for the 80 mm square mesh and the 90 mm diamond mesh. That proposal is worthy of extensive sea trials. The evidence which has been collected needs to be evaluated. Although the Commission may be reluctant to consider it, I do not see anything wrong with an extensive sea trial to examine the effectiveness of the proposal and analyse it in a proper scientific way. Adjustments might be necessary, but the proposal is worthy of serious consideration and it should not be dismissed out of hand.

In the discussion in the House last December, disappointment was voiced because the Minister did not make proposals for decommissioning. I accept that we need to take an overall approach to decommissioning within the European Community, but, from what other countries are doing, it seems that only this country has set its face against a decommissioning scheme. I wonder how many times we have to come to the House to ask for a scheme and for some progress.

The Minister said that he does not believe that a decommissioning scheme is value for money. That contradicts what he has said in previous debates. It was certainly within the realms of possibility for his civil servants to bring forward a decommissioning scheme,

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

targeted at the boats and areas which should be included in a scheme which would give value for money and would reduce the pressure on fish stocks.

Recently I met Mr. Michael Holden, who retired last year as head of the conservation unit in the European Commission's directorate-general for fisheries. He is an expert on fisheries conservation. I talked to him about conservation techniques and management. It soon became apparent from his comments that the key to conservation of fish stocks in the North sea was a reduction of effort. While we may bring in various technical measures which may be welcome and useful, it does not get away from the fact that we need to reduce effort. His opinion was the same as that of the majority of hon. Members, who believe that the only way to reduce effort in the North sea is to have a sensible and rational decommissioning scheme. The Government are completely isolated in their opposition to such a scheme.

There is grave doubt that the eight-day proposal would meet the requirements of the Government in reducing effort. What will happen is that the fishing boats which are forced to tie up for eight days will make an increased effort to make up for lost income when they go to sea. The potential for lost income is severe.

It is also worth pointing out that the vessels affected would account for only 8 per cent. of the United Kingdom cod and haddock quota over a two-year period. That makes one wonder whether such a measure is effective.

When skippers have to tie up for eight days and cannot pay their crews, it is logical that the crews will go to other boats or find other occupations. When the lie-up period is over, a skipper may have difficulty in getting a crew or in retaining his original crew. Worst of all, the eight-day rule will put pressure on skippers to put to sea in bad weather. Fishermen cannot control the weather. The eight-day rule might require skippers to tie up during good weather, which might mean that they would have to go to sea in bad weather in order to earn enough income to pay for their boats and crew.

In 1989, 22 fishing vessels were lost in bad weather, and a further 576 reported accidents were associated with bad weather. I would not want to be responsible for any measure which would put pressure on fishermen to risk their lives and the lives of their crews. I believe that the eight-day tie-up rule would put pressure on them.

I am surprised that we have not heard the argument about the way in which reduced catches increase prices. There is evidence of growing consumer resistance. The recession is partly to blame. A recent survey among household purchasers showed a decline in the last quarter in white fish purchasing.

We have seen no progress in achieving a reduction in the size of the British fleet. The recent 3 per cent. to which the Minister referred is negligible compared with reductions achieved in the fleets of other countries. As they reduce their fleets, they become eligible for grants for modernisation and restructuring, which will eventually work against the interests of our fishermen's competitiveness.

The type of decommissioning scheme that might be introduced is completely in the hands of the Government. They could structure the scheme to meet the criteria they want. For example, a decommissioning scheme could be aimed at vessels with pressure stock licences or those of a certain age and size, or by the use of other criteria. A scheme using various methods could be adopted to reduce the pressure on stocks.

One wonders how often we must raise these issues before something is done. One also wonders whether the Minister is using bankruptcy as a way of reducing effort. Is that what it is all about? Is the eight-day tie-up simply a screen to cover the fact that the Minister refuses to introduce a decommissioning scheme, so that, when he talks about the market approach, he is really talking about bankruptcy—of fishermen being forced to go out of business?

That would not of itself reduce pressure on fish stocks. When a fisherman goes bankrupt and there is a chance for someone to buy a cheap fishing boat that is lying idle in the harbour, someone will chance his arm and try to make a living with that boat. That involves the boat going out to sea again, with pressure being kept on fish stocks.

The case has been made in the House time and again for the introduction of a decommissioning scheme. We have not yet had a proper answer explaining why the Government are absolutely resolute in not introducing such a scheme. It is not as though they are having great success in dealing with the problem with their present policies. We shall not achieve progress until we link a whole package of conservation measures—the fishermen are prepared to work towards meeting the management of fish stocks, because it is in their interest to do so—because we cannot separate conservation measures from structural measures if we are to achieve real progress in reducing pressure.

There must be a decommissioning scheme. The Minister will eventually come to recognise that and put such a scheme before the House. The trouble is that by that time many fishermen will have gone bankrupt, many families will have suffered and the British fishing industry will have been put at a disadvantage compared with its main rivals in Europe.

8.12 pm

Sir Michael Shaw (Scarborough): I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak in this short debate. Not long ago, we had another short debate on the fishing industry. I hope that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), whom I congratulate on tabling the motion, even though I cannot support him, will achieve his ambition of a full day's debate in which we can discuss the whole scene affecting the fishing industry.

I shall concentrate on the eight-day tie-up. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland was right to emphasise at the outset the importance of the fabric of the fishing communities in the various fishing ports around the country. That applies in my area, with its ports of Whitby and Scarborough, as it applies to his and the constituencies of other hon. Members all the way up the north-east coast. The effect of the new option will also benefit the north-east coast, rather than the area from the Humber southwards, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) has asked me to apologise for his absence. He is in bed with the 'flu.

The timing of the debate is happy. The fishermen in my constituency, like fishermen the country over, had expressed great concern about the effect of the eight-day tie-up. Indeed, they threatened to do all sorts of things. I

met them and said that, although I supported them whole-heartedly, I could not condone any action that caused an infringement of the law. They told me that that was the last thing they wanted, but I was left in no doubt about the concern they felt.

There are 17 boats in Whitby, but we must bear in mind not only the boats but the whole infrastructure of the fishing industry. Frankly, if those boats had to tie up for eight days solid, the harbour would go dead for eight days, and that would have a disastrous effect on the fleet.

I emphasise that, although they expressed great concern, those fishermen are a law-abiding community. They felt desperate about their plight. For that reason, when they heard the news this morning that an option was being given for an increased mesh size rather than the eight-day tie-up, they were delighted. That goes for the fishermen of Whitby and Scarborough. On their behalf and mine, and the fishing organisations, I congratulate the Minister on achieving a solution so quickly. I congratulate his officials and the good will of the Commission on this occasion. I had experience of dealing with the Commission some years ago, and I know how matters move extremely slowly in that circle. It is a credit to the Minister to have been able to achieve this result so quickly. It has brought great relief to Whitby and Scarborough.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) was ungenerous. Even for those in opposition, when Ministers achieve a good result, with success from their efforts abroad, they deserve to be congratulated. I hope that the House will not be stingy in congratulating the Minister on his success.

Mr. Morley: I agree that credit should be given where it is due, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that boats that use large mesh and boats that fish with long lines should never have been caught up in the first place in the eight-day rule?

Sir Michael Shaw: Yes, and I am sure that the Minister would agree. But it was not his decision in the first place —*[Interruption.]* It was a decision of the Community. There had to be an agreement in the end. The Minister did his best to lessen the impact of the rule. From the agreement, unsatisfactory though it was, we achieved the opt-out provision afterwards. I believe that we achieved the best deal we could. We have had an assurance on the matter from the Minister, and we were indeed lucky to have had our present Ministers negotiating for us. I support them 100 per cent. and believe that they are doing an excellent job for the British fishing fleet. I accept that we have not got all we wanted, but one never gets all one wants when one has to negotiate.

Mr. Wilson: I vividly recall the hon. Gentleman taking a very critical line in our last debate about what his hon. Friends were proposing, and his finding a great deal of sympathy on this side of the House. Apparently, a solution has been found—a solution that suits his local fishermen. Can he not widen his vision once again and appreciate that a solution that deals with his local problem is not adequate to deal with the wider problem? Will he devote at least part of his speech to a more global approach to the British fishing industry?

Sir Michael Shaw: I hope that there will be such a debate very shortly, when we will be able to debate other matters. The Minister has already given us an assurance that he will continue to negotiate, and that the negotiations will include new and constructive ideas. In the end, what we need to discuss, and what I hope to discuss for a few moments tonight, is the need for conservation.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I should like my hon. Friend to reflect on the fact that what has been agreed is a conservation measure, whereas what is proposed by some sectors of the industry outside his own port is the ability to continue to fish, without conservation measures. That is what those sectors want, whereas we fought for conservation measures—measures which, by their nature, are bound to be more difficult.

Sir Michael Shaw: The last point that I made was very close to the one that the Minister has just made.

Why should my fishermen welcome the change? Undoubtedly, the increased mesh size will make fishing more difficult. That is understood by everybody, including the fishermen. However, it will allow boats to go to sea at times judged by the fishermen to be suitable. For all the reasons that I gave the last time we discussed this matter —reasons to which hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred since then—that is a great advantage. One has to bear in mind the dangers that are involved. A serious accident just this week showed what can happen in difficult sea conditions.

But, above all, the change that has come out of Brussels allows for better conservation. As I understand it, the eight-day rule does not achieve any improvement in conservation. Let me explain the situation as I understand it. Obviously, fishermen will go out in all weathers to do their best to catch their quotas. Some of them will run risks. If they do not achieve their quota, the difference will be available to other boats in their area, or, if it cannot be taken up in their area, in other areas of the United Kingdom. If that is indeed the case, the full quota will be caught one way or another—but it will be caught in the old way, and the same discards will still apply. Thus, there will be no saving.

Under the new scheme, with the bigger-mesh net, the number of discards will be reduced. Immature fish will not be caught, or, if they are caught, they will escape without damage. As we all know, the trouble about discards is that most of them die. As things are at present, too large a proportion of future years' catches are being destroyed. For a long time, my fishermen have been pressing for a change in mesh size. What would otherwise be discards will now go through the nets easily, and the fish will be able to grow for future catches. This is a great boon. It is a cause for great satisfaction to my fishermen. I hope that the Minister, in future negotiations, will be able to tackle the other problems that have been discussed.

I end by thanking my right hon. Friend for what he has done on behalf of my fishermen, and by wishing him well in the negotiations that I understand will take place next April.

8.24 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Like other hon. Members, I welcome this debate, but, again like other hon. Members, I think that it would be absolutely disgraceful if a debate initiated by the Liberal Democrats were to be used in any way as an excuse not to have a specific debate and a vote on the life-threatening eight-day continuous

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

tie-up measure and the statutory instrument that imposes it. I hope that, when the junior Minister winds up, he will give us an unequivocal guarantee that such a debate will be held as soon as possible.

When the Secretary of State for Scotland wound up in the last fisheries debate, many other hon. Members and I suspected that he was not quite sure what the 10-day rule that applied then actually involved. He said:

"That seems another sensible measure which is worth considering in the context of the need to conserve stocks.". —[*Official Report*, 13 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 1223.]

Many of us suspected that he did not understand the full implications of the continuous band that was being proposed.

When I read his current views in yesterday's Aberdeen *Evening Express*, I became absolutely convinced that, even now, the Secretary of State for Scotland does not appreciate the implications and the dangers of the tie-up regulations. The *Evening Express* quotes him as having said of the fishermen:

"They actually have more freedom now than under the previous system, when they were limited to a certain number of days at sea."

That is a quite extraordinary description of a regulation that inevitably constrains fishermen's freedom and their livelihood.

But on the same day, this article entitled "No Turning Back" appeared. Perhaps it was written by the junior Minister. The DAFS secretary of fisheries wrote to a constituent of mine, Mr. Bill Farquhar, who is chairman of the Boatbuilders Association, describing the regulations as

"the stricter arrangements this year whereby vessels are required to stay in port."

So, on the very day on which the Secretary of State for Scotland described these proposals as introducing "more freedom", his own departmental fisheries secretary told a constituent of mine that these are "stricter arrangements" than those that applied last year. We are entitled to know who is misleading whom in the Scottish Office. Is the Secretary of State for Scotland misleading his own fisheries secretary, or are the civil servants misleading the Secretary of State?

Even more important was what the Secretary of State for Scotland was to write elsewhere in the same article. The fishermen, he said,

"should never be forced out in bad weather, and I don't believe it will be necessary."

That betrays the most fundamental misunderstanding of the implications of the tie-up regulations for Scottish fishing. It is inevitable, under the eight-day continuous tie-up rule, that fishermen will be pushed to sea in rough weather. Of the first 90 available fishing days last year, no fewer than 38 had expected winds between gale force eight and storm force 10. The fishermen were already heavily constrained by the elements. It is inevitable that, under the eight-day continuous tie-up regulations, fishermen will maximise the remaining days and go to sea even when good fishing judgment suggests that it would be better for them to stay in port. Because of the economic pressure on themselves, their boats and their families, they will have no choice whatsoever.

But there is another aspect of the danger of the tie-up regulations that must be understood by Ministers. I am thinking of a situation that might arise when boats are actually at sea. At present, boats in my constituency and in the constituencies of my hon. Friend tend to be fishing north-east. They will be encountering rough conditions, which can arise very quickly. When such conditions are encountered, the sensible thing is for a boat to turn its head to the sea and ride out the storm. But imagine circumstances that could well arise in the next few days or weeks.

Fishermen in that position might know that they were approaching the start of their statutory tie-up period and that, unless they got back to a registered port in time, they would face a fine of £50,000 for breach of the reglations. Under such economic pressure it will be inevitable that, instead of riding out the storm, which would be the sensible thing to do, some people will make a dash for port —*[Interruption.]*

I see that the Minister of State, Scottish Office shakes his head. I know that he has been briefed on fishing during the past few days, but if he disagrees with my analysis, which is shared by everyone in the fishing industry, he should come to the Dispatch Box and explain why we are wrong in believing that the regulations could be life-threatening.

If the Minister of State does not disagree with my analysis, he must accept that the regulations will jeopardise the lives of fishermen at sea. No Government or Administration have the moral right to impose on fishermen legislation making their lives, which are already dangerous, even more dangerous. There is a real prospect that, if the regulations are passed unamended, people in the Treasury and the Minister with responsibility for fisheries in Scotland could end up with blood on their hands over the next few weeks and months. That must be understood.

Apart from the principle of the consecutive tie-up, the enforcement that we have seen has been vindictive. No short sea trials of repairs to engines are being allowed. No oil contract work is being allowed when a fishing boat is tied up. Fishing boats are not allowed to go back to their home ports. As hon. Members know, it is common in the north-east of Scotland for boats to land at Peterhead or Aberdeen and, a few days later, to sail back the short distance to their home port at Fraserburgh, Macduff or Lossie. Even those small trips are regarded as a breach of the tie-up regulations. They have already been described not as a tie-up but as a curfew that is being imposed on the fishing industry. If the Government impose a curfew, they must expect a fishing intifada as the industry's response.

Tie-up regulations have implications for social cohesion and discrimination against the Scottish boats. Of the boats affected by the tie-up, 400 are from Scotland and 75 from England and Wales. The regulations affect more boats from Scotland than from the rest of the European Community put together. However, the option of a regulation of under 110 mm has relevance for few if any of the Scottish boats, because one cannot pursue a mixed haddock and whiting fishery with a 110mm net. No fisherman will take up that option if he is pursuing haddock-whiting fishing.

There is a danger of a total breakdown of confidence in the relationship between fishermen and those who administer the industry. The tragedy is that the measure and configuration of nets that would provide a way out of the crisis is available, backed by the scientific evidence that has been accumulated during the past few years. The sea trials on the Sunbeam demonstrate that the 90mm

diamond configuration, with an 80 square-mesh panel, is the way to balance the needs of conservation with the entitlement of fishermen to protect their livelihoods.

I see that the Minister of State is having some trouble following the debate. Perhaps he will pay attention and explain why the results of the Sunbeam trials, which show an increase of 31 per cent. in the escape of young haddock and of 46 per cent. in the escape of young whiting, do not provide adequate evidence to show that the 90 mm/80 mm square mesh configuration is the way forward. Almost a year ago, my hon. Friends and I met the Minister with responsibility for fisheries, who was then convinced that that configuration was the right one. As the scientific evidence that has been accumulated supports that configuration, what has happened in the intervening period to change the Minister's mind? Why is he now renouncing his belief in that configuration?

I understand that there are to be sea trials in the Orkney boat Keila, which will use a 90 mm/90 mm mesh configuration. Can the Minister give us a guarantee that those trials, when they start in March, will also include the 90 mm/80 mm square mesh configuration to see which net and mesh configuration is best to meet the demands of conservation, and reconcile them with the rights of fishermen to pursue their livelihoods? If the Minister does not believe in the 90 mm/80 mm configuration, why not put it to the test in the sea trials that are to be undertaken during the next few months?

The fisheries Minister argues that the 90mm/80mm option would not be supported by the rest of the European Community. He implies that, if the matter were left to him, it would be an option, but he would never get it past the beaurocrats in Brussels. There is a way to unlock the door so that that conservation option is a possibility.

In suggesting the way, I shall refer to an article by the respected commentator Tony Mackay in *Scotland on Sunday* on 10 February. Returning from a trip to meet European officials, he wrote:

"last week in Brussels when I met officials from the EC Fisheries Directorate on studies we are undertaking for them, it was obvious that the commission's fisheries staff are sympathetic to the difficulties facing the Scottish fishing and fish processing industries, and are trying hard to find fair and acceptable solutions to these problems. The believe that they are seriously constrained by lack of co-operation from UK Government bodies, including the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland and the Sea Fish Industry Authority in Edinburgh."

Is it not entirely possible that, if the Government would fall into line with every other state in the European Community and adopt a positive attitude towards structural policy and decommissioning, they would find that what they see as hindrances to the technical conservation measures would suddenly disappear? If the Government could make their contribution to the European Community, would not they find that the European officials would realise that that was the way forward for the Scottish fishing industry?

Why on earth should Europe not wish to see the 90 mm/80 mm square-mesh panel? We know that haddock is an overwhelmingly United Kingdom fishery—indeed, a largely Scottish fishery. Why should there be opposition within the European Community to a measure on the haddock fishery, pursued by the Scottish fishing industry?

In previous debates, I have referred to the substantial disadvantage that the Government's negative attitude towards structural policy places on Scottish fishermen and the competitive position of our fishermen relative to other fleets. No less than £150 million has been poured into other European fishing industries over three years. How on earth can our industry compete when no financial structural support has been given to the United Kingdom and Scottish fleet over that period because of the Government's obdurate attitude towards decommissioning?

There is a substantial suspicion, not just among Opposition Members, that the basic reason why the Government have set their face against decommissioning is to save the face of the Minister of Agriculture, who had responsibility during the debacle six or seven years ago when decommissioning money was literally poured up the Humber with no controls. Instead of continuing with a refusal that jeopardises the livelihoods of Scottish fishermen and endangers the survival of the fishing industry, let us have some sensible, structural and conservation measures. We reject this dangerous, perverse, punitive and life-threatening eight-day tie-up, on which the Government seem to have set their hearts.

8.38 pm

Mr. Allick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): It would be remiss of us to allow the debate to pass without paying tribute to the late Gilbert Buchan. He was a most distinguished former president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, and he died two weeks ago. He was respected in the industry, throughout Scotland, the United Kingdom and Europe, and, having worked with him in European Community negotiations, I can say that I know few people who were more truly leaders or more loyal friends than he. I am sure that I speak for many in the House when I say that. I also know few people who were tougher negotiators than he was, as former Ministers will testify, but the great thing about Gilbert was that when he made an agreement he stuck to it, and one knew where one was with him at all times.

It would be remiss of me not to mention his service to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve with the minesweepers in the war, during which he was decorated for gallantry. That reminds us all of the role that our fishermen have, in a wider strategic sense, in the long-term defence of this country. I know that all hon. Members will join me in sending sympathy to his wife Jessie and members of his family.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) not only for taking the opportunity to initiate this debate but for his contribution to it, which I regarded as reasonable, sensible and based on the practical common sense of the industry.

I should like to take up two small points from the speech of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary. He said that, following the new mesh arrangements negotiated this week, he would amend the statutory instrument on the tie-up rule, which we shall, I hope, shortly be able to debate. I was not aware that statutory instruments could be amended. Surely a new statutory instrument will be involved. Perhaps my hon. Friend will clarify that technical point for us. We want to know whether we shall have the opportunity to debate the two statutory instruments, taken together.

The second point is more substantial. I smiled wryly to myself when the Minister said that our enforcement of fishing conservation measures was the most effective in

[Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith]

Europe. In one sense he was right to take credit for that, but I should not like to leave it at that without discussing the downside of our effective conservation measures—that they are less fair to our fishermen because our enforcement of them is more effective. We want a "level sea" in relation to competition with Europe. So let us not ignore the results of this effective enforcement.

The Parliamentary Secretary must realise that, because conservation measures are not perceived to be applied fairly across Europe, that adds to the sense of frustration and desperation among our fishermen, who see fishermen from other countries getting away with avoiding these conservation measures because they are not properly enforced. So our fishermen have more bitter experience of some of the consequences of these measures than their European counterparts.

My hon. Friend said that we needed to achieve a 30 per cent. cut in our fishing effort. I do not know whether that figure is right, but I know that we need a cut. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation made a major contribution to a number of practical and sensible measures, incorporated in their 1988 proposals, to achieve conservation that will help to limit the fishing effort. We must ask whether some of the measures introduced since the 1988 proposals are sensible or practical. If they are to be observed and sensibly enforced, we must ensure that they are practical, because only can they be effective.

I regard the tie-up rule as patent nonsense. It is utterly artificial. I said that in the December debate and I say it again now. I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary will agree with me. I know that an overall settlement was imposed on him, and I pay tribute to the way in which he fought against it; but now that it has been imposed on us, I hope that he will not let up in trying to have it removed or alleviated before too much damage is done to our fishing industry.

The tie-up measure wholly fails to recognise everyday practical circumstances with which fishermen have to contend, such as the weather. It is riddled with anomalies, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said: fishermen having to sail from their port of landing to their home port and being counted as having spent a day at sea. Nor should we underestimate the social and human consequences, not only for those in the industry but for their families. They have enough stress to cope with without having artificial stress imposed on them as well.

As for mesh sizes, I welcome in principle the alternative to the tie-up rule that my hon. Friend achieved in Brussels this week. I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw), because this will be a real practical help to fishermen in his area fishing for cod. However, my hon. Friend must recognise that the new measure is not a practical alternative to the tie-up rule for those fishing for haddock and whiting. That is why I said that I welcomed the move in principle—because I hope that it will reopen the debate on mesh sizes. My hon. Friend must recognise that what has been negotiated so far will not have a practical application for the Scottish fishing fleet, I urge him to negotiate something better for Scottish fishermen along the same lines.

I was a little disappointed by the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who dismissed the 90 mm net with the 80 mm square mesh on the panel at the end. I agree that the number of fish caught may be the same, but my right hon. Friend must not forget the smaller fish that escape and add to stocks in future years. That is the message to send to Brussels. This is a conservation measure that will effectively safeguard the future of our fishery stocks—if that is what we truly want, and I do.

I am glad that further consultations are being held with the industry on this matter. I hope that they will be constructive and that both sides will come to them with open minds to reach a compromise—perhaps on a 90/90mm; and that progress in Europe will be achieved. If it is, it could greatly assist the conservation effort and as such it will be well worth while——

Mr. Salmond: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman, with his ministerial experience, would support the view that there is enormous attraction in going for a conservation measure which works and which also carries the wholehearted support of the people who will have to operate it—the fishermen.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I said a few moments ago that if measures are sensible and practical they are easier to enforce and much more likely to be observed. That is why they are more effective. I am glad to have the hon. Gentleman's support on that.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) was right in what he said about structure. We cannot separate structure from other conservation measures which are part of the overall scheme to bring about a reduction in fishing effort. To neglect or dismiss it, as Ministers often do, is like trying to fight for the industry with one hand tied behind one's back. We will not get effective conservation or build an efficient and effective British fishing industry if we do not show much more readiness to tackle structure.

The blockage in the Minister's mind arises from past scars for which the industry is having to pay the penalty. What about consistency? Is structure being ignored in the discussions on agriculture in Europe? Of course not. Structure is one of the major elements submitted by the Commission to the Council of Ministers. Structural policy is a major element in negotiations on agriculture, but our Government are the only Government in Europe who turn their back on structure in the fishing industry. It does not make sense, and it is not in the best interests of the fishing industry or Britain.

The Minister said that his opposition had nothing to do with previous schemes. I accept what he says about that, and will not try to deal with it now. The circumstances were different. I endorse what he said about tackling tonnage and fishing capacity and trying to make sure that they are targeted. Nobody denies that problems exist, but they are not beyond the wit of civil servants or Ministers to resolve. I agree that a system has to be linked to a strict licensing scheme, so that capacity is not knocked out in one place only to reappear in another. It is possible to have a disciplined structure. Fishing is a hunting industry, whereas agriculture is about husbandry. Inevitably, Governments intervene in a thousand ways, such as laying down rules about days at sea and tying up and mesh size.

I wish that we did not have a hang-up about decommissioning, because it prevents us from tackling the structure of the industry. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister and the Scottish Office to bear in mind the

consequences of turning our back on structure. When we do that, we lose one of the major methods of gearing our fishing effort to available stocks. That is the most important benefit we lose, but we lose two others. We lose grants which are available to every other country in Europe, and I do not see why our industry should be denied such grants.

As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, other Governments and other industries are amazed at our attitude. It does not do us any good because other Governments and industries which use structural measures to reduce their fishing effort say to our fishermen, "What are your Government doing to reduce your effort?" Our fishermen know that such measures are effective in other countries and that makes them much less supportive of measures that we propose, such as 90/80 mm or 90/90 mm mesh sizes.

In a major area, we must not turn our backs on an important tool. By doing such things we deny ourselves support. Nobody knows better than I do that we cannot win battles on our own in Europe. We have to have allies, and it is stupid to deny ourselves allies to achieve some of the other good measures upon which all hon. Members agree.

I make no apology for speaking at length on decommissioning and structure. I hope that the other measures that we have discussed will work. However, as I said earlier, they are only part measures. We have to add structures, and only if we are prepared to do that will we see more effective conservation of our fish stocks and a more stable future for our fishing industry and fishing communities.

8.55 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): In the three and a half years that I have been in the House and attending fishing debates, I have noted the remarkable consistency of the subjects and the way that they have been dealt with. There is unanimity about the interests and importance of our fishing industry, but no progress seems to have been made. Confrontation hovers over the quotas, which are outwith the hands of the House and are decided in Brussels. No progress is made on issues such as decommissioning, conservation and structure that could be implemented here. That is despite our unanimity of purpose because we all want to see a thriving and safe industry playing its part in the national economy and, in my case, its important part in the economy of the Grampian region.

It is not difficult to see why we fail to make progress. The Minister repeated the standard Government position on decommissioning. It seems that they got their fingers burned once before and are not prepared to try again. The right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) put his finger on the issue much more effectively than I can, because he was a Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I was dismayed to hear the Minister dismiss so readily the ideas of the Scottish Fisherman's Federation for the 90 mm diamond mesh net and the 80 mm square mesh window. As the Minister well knows, a great deal of research has been carried out into the operation of that system. I understand that the experiments carried out by the marine laboratory in my constituency involved the Sunbeam, a Shetland-based vessel, and produced quite staggering results. For example, they showed that there is a discard rate of 46 per cent. in the whiting catch. That is phenomenal. The discard rate for haddock was 31 per cent. A video is available and I hope to see it soon. I understand that it shows exactly how the fish react to that configuration of nets. That is a positive step towards conservation.

The same scientists discovered that the 90 mm diamond net and 90 mm square mesh window were not effective—not so much from the point of view of conservation because more fish escaped—in giving fishermen a marketable catch. The industry depends on a marketable catch for its survival. The Minister suggested the possibility of consultation on the introduction of a 90 mm square net window. We must consider the consequences of that development. If the work undertaken at the marine laboratory is valid, fishermen will have to spend even more time at sea to obtain the same size of catch, and their overheads will rise accordingly—as will the size of the risk that they must take.

We do not see any willingness on the Government's part to listen to valid arguments. The way forward is for all sides of the industry, the Government and the Ministry to sit down and talk with the fishermen. Obviously, hard positions are taken by both sides. The fishermen want to catch as much fish as they can, make as much money as they can, and pay for their boats as easily as they can. The Ministry has a wider interest.

In the current state of confrontation, it is difficult to see how progress can be made without a meeting of minds, to arrive at a consensus, so that the Government can make a case for the UK fishing industry with the backing of the fishermen themselves and right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. At present, we seem only to react to what comes out of Brussels. If Commissioner Marin comes up with a proposal for a 120 mm net, we deem it to be a great victory if we achieve agreement on a 110 mm net. That is nonsense.

We are in a position to take the lead. Our fishermen want to be involved, and so should the Government. We ought to be taking the initiative. The fisheries are on our doorstep, and we have the largest interest in them, yet we are lagging behind in representing an industry that is crucial not only to the nation's well-being in terms of the food value that fish offers, but to the economy of areas such as that which I represent, where thousands of jobs depend on it.

I want to see more positive action from the Government. I would like to see them sitting down and listening rather than trying to impose their concept of the best way forward. There are many good ideas around, and the Government should be prepared to listen.

Fish processing is an aspect of the industry that is often ignored in our debates, because right hon. and hon. Members mostly represent the catching side of the industry. Aberdeen is a major fish processing centre. A report published by Grampian regional council for economic development and planning, "The Importance of Fishing to the Grampian Region", estimates that the fish processing sector provides employment for 4,500 people. It has been hard hit by the crisis in the industry and has suffered about 750 job losses over the past year, with 15 firms having closed.

The income enjoyed by fish catchers has remained relatively stable, although I know that inflation has affected them, too. However, those employed in fish

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processing have been forced to cope with the huge price increases that are the consequence of lower catches. Over the past year, processors have paid 8 per cent. more for 14 per cent. less fish, which has had a huge impact on their business. For haddock alone, they pay 41 per cent. more. That filters through to produce the job losses to which I referred, as well as to the housewife, who must pay huge prices for the fish she buys from her fishmonger or supermarket. It is staggering to see haddock selling at a higher price than salmon, and at almost the same price as best steak. Haddock is a healthy and clean food, and we should encourage people to buy it—but high prices make that difficult to achieve.

The Government refuse to recognise the difficulties that the fish processing industry faces. It is currently attempting to gear itself up to meet new European hygiene regulations, which requires a mammoth investment, with the support of the Scottish Development Agency, local authorities in the Grampian region, and Aberdeen district council. They recognise that the industry must be modernised to meet European standards, most of which were set by the Torry research laboratory in my constituency. We know what will be the impact of those regulations.

The fishing industry is gearing up, but it is not being helped to adjust to the difficult period it faces. There is no unified structural approach to the industry, which, if it is indeed seen as a vital, essential part of the food industry as a whole, should surely receive the same support as farming.

I know that this is not entirely relevant to the debate, but, like other hon. Members, I have been lobbied by the salmon net fishermen. In 1988, the Government reduced the number of hours during which they were allowed to fish, which has taken many of them to the edge of bankruptcy. I spoke recently to a former trawlerman who had invested £100,000 in his business—his entire capital —and now finds that it is on the verge of closure.

Mr. Wilson: What has been done to Scotland's salmon net fishing industry is, in a sense, unique. The noose has been tightened, and men have been driven out of business for the specific purpose of enriching others who are pursuing the same fish. The Government have deliberately discriminated against an industry that is rooted in centuries of tradition in many parts of rural Scotland, to the benefit of another sector. Surely the least they can do is compensate those whom they have forced out of business, and I hope that they will belatedly do something for the salmon net fishermen who have been treated so grotesquely.

Mr. Doran: I agree. The downturn in the salmon net fishing business has nothing to do with the reduction in the number of fish, investment in new technology or anything of that nature; it is a direct consequence of the reduction in the number of fishing hours, which is itself a direct consequence of the Government's legislation. Nothing has been done to help those fishermen to adjust, although, in remote areas such as Caithness and Sutherland, they provide vital, albeit seasonal, employment. Businesses are going to the wall in those areas.

Fish—whether or not it is caught at sea—must be seen as a vital element of the wider industry. We want unity of approach, rather than the confrontational attitude that the Government have adopted so far.

9.7 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): I too am delighted to have an opportunity to contribute to this important debate, as my constituency contains the major port of Lowestoft. My delight ends there, however.

I feel a good deal of sympathy with the thrust of the Scottish amendment, which refers to "crisis in fishing". Like farming, the fishing industry is sometimes accused of crying wolf too often. Some may think that the current crisis represents more of the same, but I do not agree: the industry is crying wolf for real. For those with mortgages to pay, boat loans to service and businesses and families to maintain, the wolf is at the door.

This is, as much as anything, a crisis of confidence. The common fisheries policy is at the heart of it: it has taken the freedom to regulate the British fishing industry virtually out of the Government's hands, yet the Government still have to do some of the CFP's dirty work.

I instinctively incline to the school of thought that argues that the CFP should promptly be scrapped, but I take the point made to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) in a private discussion last week. I called the CFP a dog's breakfast; he—with his many years of wisdom and experience in the House—cautioned me about the dangers of replacing a dog's breakfast with a pig's dinner.

While that may be wise, there is no doubt that the CFP's conservation measures simply do not work. It is a failed system. Every year, the extent of that failure becomes more apparent: there are still too many out-of-date boats chasing too few fish, there is still alarming scientific evidence every year, and the chasms in confidence continue. Faced with failure of the system, we bolt on another piece of machinery. This year, it is the unloved eight-day tie-up, which we have heard so much about tonight. Next year what will it be? It may be a 22-day tie-up and an eight-day fishing rule.

There are all sorts of worries about the common fisheries policy. My hon. Friend has an open door, listens well and speaks straight, but worries still linger about the even-handed application of quotas and all the other paraphernalia that surrounds the fishing industry. Any question addressed to him about the Dutch, the French, the Belgians or the Spaniards is ususally answered with the cry, "Enforcement in other countries is a matter for other national Governments." Yes, but it is all a question of confidence among British fishermen about what is happening in other countries. Can they be confident about the Spanish Government's commitment to enforcement while there is a Spanish Fisheries Commissioner? Their confidence is wafer-thin.

What hurt Lowestoft in particular was the sudden closure of fisheries before the end of the year. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food found that the full catch figures had been reached. Lowestoft's cod and sole fisheries were suddenly shut. Fishermen had been told only days before that everything was on target until the end of the year. One company alone in Lowestoft lost £333,000 due to the closure of the sole fishery. Confidence in the management of the regime is in short supply.

I am sorry to have to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I too wish to return to the question of decommissioning. The alternative is British bankruptcies. We said last month and in December that decommissioning is not a magic answer, but it must surely help. I shall not rehearse again the arguments in favour of the scheme. All I would add is that a properly administered, financed and policed scheme would, in the first instance, have to be voluntary. Many Lowestoft fishermen do not want to leave the industry. Fishermen in other ports, however, might happily leave the industry if it were made worth their while to do so —if they could pay their debts and still have something left over.

Such a scheme would make payments to boat owners and fishermen, but fish merchants and other indirect employees in the industry could be wiped out by it. Thought must be given to a whole-industry approach when it comes to restructuring it. I hope that that will be borne in mind. Fish merchants want only to keep a reliable supply of good quality fish available to the housewife. Their task in Lowestoft is made much harder when the economics of the industry frequently obliges boats to land their catch in Holland rather than in Lowestoft.

Ministers have an unenviable task. They go to Council of Ministers meetings clutching the tattered trousers of the common fisheries policy around them. Too often our European competitors strip the trousers off them. Consequently, they return naked from those meetings. When that happens, we cannot pretend that the CFP suit of clothes is wonderful. Those hon. Members who represent fishing ports have to play the little boy to the Minister's emperor and point out that there is nothing there—that it is a sham, a charade, a pantomime, if it were not so serious.

I shall not weary the House with my objections to the eight-day tie-up. What I have had to say about the CFP, however, leads me to a list of questions and doubts which I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to answer in writing. Will he resist an EEC trend to amalgamate all directed fisheries in the interests of bureaucratic convenience? How are North sea fishermen and related workers—they total about 2,000 in Lowestoft alone—supposed to weather effort restriction, quota cuts and increases in mesh size all at once? What thought is being given to how these ideas relate to the real world at sea and the real world of the fish markets?

If we all recognise that limitation by quantity alone fails to tackle the problem—United Kingdom fishermen have taken major reductions over the last few years—at what point do the Government say that they are happy to allow bankruptcies to help them to achieve fleet reduction and that they are happy to let the Dutch take over the North sea? When is enough enough? No one looking at the European scene, particularly the Dutch fishing industry, foresees the Dutch retreating from the fishing scene.

We hear frequently from Scottish Members with fishing constituencies that Scotland faces serious difficulties. Those difficulties may not be exaggerated, but I am sorry to say that there is often little sympathy for Scottish fishermen in the English ports. Does not the fact that there is little sympathy for Scottish fishermen reflect the confrontational nature of the common fisheries policy? The confrontation can only get worse as the European Community grows bigger, particularly if Norway, Sweden and goodness who else joins. That confrontation governs the industry, which is already the most divided industry in Britain. I remember only a couple of years ago talking to a group of angry inshore fishermen, complete with placards and banners, outside the Lowestoft fish laboratory gates. Two years ago, things were by no means as bad for them.

The Hague preference is often quoted as a wonderful device which triggers extra fish entitlement when total allowable catches fall low. It may be marvellous for Bridlington and ports northwards, but what about Lowestoft and ports south of that line? If the cod reductions invoke the Hague preference, will East Anglia be discriminated against again? Will the French get away with special derogation on mesh sizes in the southern North sea? If we go on horse-trading and quota-swapping with plaice, for example, because Lowestoft is not allowed a fleet big enough to catch its full quota, what guarantee is there that other EC Governments will not say, "Well, you didn't need it when you swapped it, so you don't need it in the future"?

What noises are we making about the former East German fleet, which is underused, inefficient and out of date? It is ideal, surely, for scrapping en bloc without any replacement.

At a time when Europeans could and should be eating more fish, the industry is facing not only the sea, but all the dead weight of the CFP, from surveillance to the transmission of catch data, and from licensing, through bycatches to technical measures. Can one wonder that there was a howl of derision last year when Mr. Marin claimed that the CFP was "theoretically perfect". Presumably, he meant that it was "theoretically perfect" in the same way that the community charge is "theoretically perfect".

During my remarks, I have mixed as many clichés as there are species in the sea. I want to end by saying to my hon. Friend the Minister that it is the blanket policy of the CFP that is so stifling. Every port, every section of the industry, every country and every species is different. The CFP must have the flexibility to reflect that. It must have it now or the crisis will destroy the entire industry.

9.16 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): As a conservationist who represents fishing interests in Northern Ireland, I am naturally concerned about the decimation of our fish stocks and their conservation, especially in the Irish sea. From a conservation point of view, I have a great interest in the long-line fishermen and believe that they have been unfairly treated under the Government's current conservation policy.

The selective nature of long-line fishing precludes almost exclusively catches of under-sized fish. As a conservation measure, the Government should encourage that type of fishing without restrictions. The problem facing the Government appears to be that there are too many boats fishing for too few fish. However, the Government should be aware that they have allowed the unrestricted building of boats of under 10 m which has considerably added to the tonnage. Many of those boats were not for established full-time fishermen, yet they are allowed to fish completely without restriction while established fishermen are losing their livelihood. A conservation policy that is directed only at certain fishermen and vessels is unfair and can never be successful.

[Mr. A. Cecil Walker]

There has been much discussion this evening about square mesh panels. I support their use as a conservation measure. Experiments with square mesh panels show conclusively that they have dramatically reduced the discards of immature fish. They have also caught better quality fish with less crushing, and have saved time and effort in sorting large quantities of under-sized fish.

I understand that the Government are planning the use of 90 mm panels for white fish and 70 mm panels for prawns, but trials with 90 mm mesh in the Irish sea fishery showed a fairly substantial loss of marketable whiting. From that we may deduce that 80 mm panels would be an acceptable compromise for white fish.

The prawn fishermen have also experienced beneficial effects on prawn catches, as well as a significant reduction in discarded fish. It appears that, whatever mesh is used in the panel, prawns will not be lost, so I am concerned that the Government are opting for 70 mm panels in prawn gear. The panel is there for the release of juvenile fish—the same fish that will be caught in the white fish gear—so I suggest that the Government should consider an 80 mm mesh for both white fish and prawns.

I have great sympathy for our fishermen who go to sea in all weathers to provide the fish for our consumption. I do not have the same feelings about those who deprive our sea bird population of the means of survival. I am referring to those who send thousands of tonnes of sandeels and other fish not considered suitable for human consumption to fishmeal factories to produce protein which is readily available from other renewable sources.

It is distressing for me to see gannets and herring-gulls squabbling over offal when these beautiful birds should be hunting their own food, which has been taken from them by the over-activity of boats concerned with fishmeal fishing. Other species of bird—notably puffins, kittiwakes and members of the skua family—are now seriously at risk because they have become incapable of reproducing due to the lack of food during the breeding season.

Conservation must go hand in hand with the fishing industry. Without one, there will not be the other.

9.21 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I shall be brief, as other hon. Members want to speak.

I want to make four points. I hope that the first of them will not be taken the wrong way. This evening, I had a telephone call from a constituent who had seen on television our exchanges yesterday following the private notice question on the contingency arrangements—let us hope that it never happens—for the B52 bombers to drop their bombs unprimed in the Bristol channel. Unfortunately, some Opposition Members laughed at remarks made by Conservative Members who pointed out the possible danger to the fishing fleet. The channel is a main fishing ground. The laughter was open to misinterpretation, I am sure, but I hope that those Opposition Members who do not know the position of the fishing fleet and the dangers that it runs—there are none of them here tonight—will think again.

Mr. Wilson: Disgraceful.

Mr. Harris: I am only reporting the reaction of people in my constituency who watched our proceedings on television. I shall not labour the point, but it should be put on record because all hon. Members in the Chamber tonight know the dangers that the fishing fleet faces.

Similarly, I hope that my second point will not open old wounds between the two sides of the House. It concerns the whole of question of misreporting. I was delighted to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister said about correcting the bogus track record that certain Scottish boats had built up through misreporting. That question has been a feature of our last two fishing debates. I hope that that injustice will be put right. I was pleased that the Minister hinted—indeed, gave an assurance—that that would happen, because cheating and misreporting have undoubtedly hit fishermen in my area and in other areas of the United Kingdom.

My third point arises from the eight-day rule. There is a curious spin-off of that rule. Until today, it seemed that some boats from Scotland and the north of England that have been sold to fishermen in the south-west of England and which now operate exclusively in area 7, off the south-west, could still be caught by the eight-day rule even though they were not fishing in the areas affected by it. I was pleased today to receive a letter from my hon. Friend the Minister saying that one boat in my area would not be caught by the eight-day tie-up rule. Other boats may be affected. I know that there is one in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale). I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can confirm, perhaps in writing, that all boats affected in this way—there may be more—will be exempt from that provision.

My fourth point looks to the future. I look with considerable apprehension to the future on a topic that has hardly been touched on tonight—the mid-term review by the Commission of the common fisheries policy. The Commission has power to submit a report by the end of this year on the working of the CFP. I sound a warning note on that. It would be disastrous if the Commission used that mid-term review to open up the common fisheries policy in a way that is detrimental to Britain and its fishermen.

There have been two major developments since the introduction of the common fisheries policy. One is the accession of Spain to the European Community, with all the consequences of quota hopping. I welcome the remarks that my hon. Friend the Minister made on the way in which we fought the case against the Spaniards in the European Court of Justice.

Another more recent development is extremely worrying and was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter). He made passing reference to the reunification of Germany, and mentioned the position of what was formerly the East German fleet and the consequences that that will have. Again, I sound a warning that there could be wide repercussions on British fishermen if the issue is not handled properly. On that gloomy note, I shall finish and allow other hon. Members to speak.

9.26 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The debate has been too short to allow everyone who wished to speak to do so, but the House will acknowledge that it has been a valuable debate which has allowed, representatives of no fewer than six political parties to

discuss an industry whose predicament is recognised across the House. Its predicament requires exceptional measures, if it is not to be caught in a savage double bind of rising costs and contracting resources caused by falling stocks of fish. The diminution of our fishing industry will be at the expense of communities throughout our country, many in remote areas, with fragile economies which heavily depend on the fishing industry—not only fishermen and their families but the shore-based industries which service and depend on the fishing industry.

This is an important debate. It was also significant in that no disagreement was voiced during discussions between hon. Members on both sides of the House. A sharp difference of opinion was expressed with the Minister's remarks. Almost everyone who has spoken disagreed with him fundamentally, especially on the Government's attitude to the structural changes which are necessary if the British fishing industry is to survive this crisis.

The debate takes place against the background of severely increased costs for fuel, repairs and insurance and an increase in other costs which are necessarily incurred if the fleet is to be sustained, never mind replaced. One of the disturbing features of the industry is the prospect of an aging fleet because no one will be able to invest in modernisation.

I do not believe that the Government have measured up to the seriousness of the problem. They give the impression that they are running before the wind of opinion in Europe and are behind the European Commission in its attempts to tackle the difficulties of the industry. I welcomed yesterday's announcement of a modest change in the tie-up rule and the consequential change regarding the single net conservation measure that the Minister announced tonight. I am glad to learn about the new order and I hope that it will take into account some of the things that have been said in today's debate. If the scheme is not to be abandoned I hope that other changes will be made to its operation.

I particularly draw the Minister's attention to the great dissatisfaction in the fishing industry about the midnight to midnight aspect of the tie-up rule. Because of that, the eight-day period is effectively extended to nine or even 10 days. We have received representations on that, and a change should be made. If the Minister is not prepared to abandon the scheme, I hope that he will be prepared to consider a change to make the scheme run from midday to midday.

Tonight there was one monetary problem—perhaps it was a misunderstanding— when the hon. Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) referred to the mandatory tie-up scheme and said that the modification allowing the 110 mm option was a solution to the problem. It is clearly not a solution for those involved in the haddock and whiting sector of the industry. It may benefit those who fish off the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) for cod, monkfish and megrim—those catches may be a staple part of their returns.

Sir Michael Shaw *rose——*

Mr. Maclennan: Because of the shortage of time I have already prevented other hon. Members from taking part, so it would be sensible not to give way. However, I should happily give way to those hon. Members who have had no opportunity to make their speeches.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I shall take up that invitation. My hon. Friend has already mentioned whiting and it is important to remind the Minister that Northumberland has a winter-directed whiting fishery, but that would be prevented by the Government's 1990 proposals. I hope that the Minister will keep that in mind when he considers the responses he has received to those proposals.

Mr. Maclennan: I hope that the Minister heard that.

My right hon. Friends and I were moved to seek this debate because of the totally unacceptable nature of the mandatory tie-up scheme. I am pleased to see that the Minister of State, Scottish Office is to reply to the debate. We welcome his participation.

The tie-up scheme is ill conceived. Not only will demerits flow from it, but it is unlikely to achieve its purpose. We have been advised by the Minister that the objective was to reduce the fishing effort by 30 per cent. However, it is extremely unlikely that that will flow from the scheme. I believe that people will fish harder and longer during the two thirds of the month left to them. That will, of course, disrupt their family lives. Of course, it will also lead to their running risks which in proper circumstances they would not choose to run.

A reduction of 30 per cent. in their effort is palpably not going to happen. That is why I intervened in the Minister's speech to ask him whether, when it becomes clear that it has not happened, the Government will condone any suggestion from Brussels that the tie-up period should be extended beyond eight days in the hope that that would further reduce fishing effort. It must not be. I hope that the Minister will give a categorical assurance on that point for the future. The safety of our fishermen must be our prime concern. I am deeply concerned, like the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), about the possibility of people being caught at sea, not being able to ride out the storm, and being forced to come back because of the threat of having to pay substantial fines of up to £50,000.

The rigidity of the scheme is one of its most worrying features. In my constituency, one skipper, Mr. Andrew Bremner of Wick, found himself at the end of the first week, having stayed tied up, wanting to get out but recognising that the weather was worsening. He sought permission to leave Wick and transfer to Scrabster before his eight-day period was up—a perfectly sensible thing to do. He was even prepared to take the fishery officer with him to show that he did not intend to do anything that he should not do, but he was told firmly by the Department that it was not permissible to transfer. As a result, he lost two additional days of fishing and was tied up effectively for 10 days.

Such rigidity in the operation of the scheme is unacceptable. Because the fines are so steep, it is inconceivable that fishermen will want to run the risk of incurring penalties by doing what they are not permitted to do under the scheme. Other hon. Members have spoken of the problem of getting back to the home port, and how that too could cut down on fishing time. The scheme is not flexible, it is not safe and it will seriously erode the

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economic livelihood of those in the industry. It establishes a highly dangerous precedent within the Community schemes for regulation, and it should be abandoned.

The Parliamentary Secretary suggested that proper alternatives had not been canvassed. I do not understand how he can say that, in the light of the representations that have been made by the fishing industry all around the country about what conservation measures ought to be advanced by the Government. I know of at least five proposals from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. The Parliamentary Secretary has bowed in the direction of one of them tonight—the single net on the vessel in the context of the 110 mm relaxation of the rule. Many other proposals on conservation have been made, but they do not seem to have been prosecuted with the vigour that one looks for from a Government.

The attitude to the 90 mm diamond-shaped mesh, with the 80 mm square net panel at the end of the net, seem not to be based on any scientific belief that it would not be effective. Experimentation suggests that it would be. If the Minister says that it will not wash, is he simply saying that it is not acceptable in Brussels? If so, what work has Brussels done on it? Can the Minister of State clarify the point in his reply to the debate? On what scientific evidence are the Government resting the case against the 90 mm diamond mesh, with the 80 mm square mesh panel?

What has been the attitude of the Government to the whole question of industrial fishing? A large part of the industry believes that that should be tackled as a matter of urgency. There have been proposals for an increase in the minimum landing size for whiting and suggestions about how better enforcement in the Community might help to tackle more effectively the problem of conservation.

But those conservation methods, which have not been prosecuted since they were first advanced by the industry about two years ago, cannot of themselves tackle the great problem of the over-capacity of the industry and the impossibility of an industry of this size returning adequate rewards to fishermen in the face of diminishing stocks.

The Government have taken some comfort from the fact that prices have risen somewhat in the last year. But they are not back—or, if they are, only just—to the level that they were in 1987, and costs have risen enormously during that time. The Minister must acknowledge that prices are bumping against a ceiling imposed from outside the fishing industry by the fact that fish must compete with white meat and other forms of protein, and there is not a market situation that will allow increased pricing for a diminishing volume of fish to solve the industry's problems.

As that route is blocked, it is becoming increasingly hard to understand why the Government have not listened to the advice offered not only by the industry but by hon. Members from six parties in the House, most eloquently by the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) on the question of structure. It is not possible to tackle the problem without looking at the whole question of structure.

We are financing other countries, through our contributions to the EC, to restructure their industries—to put them in a better position to compete—and we see the seriousness of that when we examine the prospect of EC enlargement. The Scandinavian countries are now turning to the EC and are knocking at our door. Are we to face an enlarged Community with our fleet debilitated and run down as a result of the refusal of the Government to pick up what is Community policy—to make the restructuring of the fleet an integral part of their approach to tackling the problem of over-supply?

I appeal to the Government to open the dialogue properly with the industry on this issue. One constructive development in the debate occurred at the beginning, when the Minister made it clear that at least two of the old objections to a decommissioning scheme had been disposed of. It is not because the Public Accounts Committee ruled against decommissioning schemes in principle and it is not because the scheme that we had pumped money up the Humber, as it has been colourfully described. It is because the Government believe that they would not get value for money.

Can we sit around the table and discuss that? Can we discuss it—the Government, the industry and the experts who advise the industry, if necessary with people from Brussels—and have a meeting of minds on the question of value for money? Everyone wants value for money. What block stands in the way of resolving the problem? The Government will do themselves a service if tonight the Minister expresses a willingness to initiate such a dialogue. That is the least we can expect to come from this debate. I appeal to the Minister, as a person who, I know, does not want to see the industries of Scotland die around him, to open that debate with his response tonight.

9.45 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I thank the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) for his welcome. This has been a very interesting debate. Bearing in mind the fact that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has gone to such considerable pains to persuade our colleagues in the European Community to reduce the number of days from 10 to eight, I was slightly surprised when the hon. Gentleman asked for an assurance that the Government would not extend the eight-day tie-up period. I think that he can be fairly safe with that assurance.

It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman is making a great error if he confuses structure—the Government agree that there is a need to look at structure—with a decommissioning scheme per se. A number of countries in the Community have begun to consider individual transferable quota schemes, for example. The Government have themselves submitted a capacity aggregation scheme. In a sense, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) confused the need to look at structure with the need to look solely at decommissioning. That is a matter to which I will return in a few moments.

The motion refers to

"a crisis in the fishing industry".

In fact, the Government are trying to conserve fish stocks with a view to preventing a real crisis in the future. The worst crisis of all for the fishing industry would arise if there were no fish in the sea. During the 1970s, the North sea herring stock collapsed because of over-fishing, forcing the closure of the fishery. Only through careful conservation has the fishery recovered. On the other side of the Atlantic, the George bank haddock stock collapsed over 20 years ago and has never recovered. In both cases, there were severe consequences for the fishermen and for

the processing industries that were dependent on the fisheries. That is a matter to which the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) referred. We must avoid such a collapse of our cod and haddock stocks.

Conservation measures, such as the introduction of the 90 mm square mesh panel and the eight-day tie-up, have an effect of fishermen's incomes. No one denies that. I very much regret it, but we must balance short-term needs against the long-term survival of the industry.

Tragic events towards the end of last year reminded us —if any reminder was necessary—that fishing is a hazardous occupation and that the safety of crews must be put above all other considerations. I say to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that, in administering the eight-day tie-up, we shall not require fishermen to do anything that would directly put their vessels at risk. In the same way, we shall expect fishermen not to behave irresponsibly by going to sea when it is not safe to do so.

Mr. Salmond: If that is the case, will the Minister answer the substantive questions that were put to him during the debate? Does he not agree that this measure will force fishermen to sea under economic pressure? Also, what will happen when a boat that is riding out a storm runs up against the eight-day period? It will have to set sail for port when prudence dictates that it should continue to shelter. Will the Minister please answer those two specific questions? Can he explain how these things will not constitute a danger to fishermen at sea?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say that the scheme will be administered flexibly. Under the scheme, as he knows, there is a requirement to give 12 hours' notice of the port where the tie-up will take place. That does not have to be the port of normal location. If it were not sensible, because of weather conditions, to make for port, we should expect the fisheries inspector to take a flexible view. No one is suggesting anything to the contrary.

I am delighted if that reassures the hon. Gentleman. If he is saying that, as a result of the scheme, people will seek to maintain their livelihood by continuing to aim for the same levels of stocks, clearly he is arguing that the scheme will not reduce fishing activity. There is no way to reduce the number of fish coming out of the sea that will not result in a loss of income, other than an approach that offers an opportunity for both positions, which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is trying to achieve through the use of equipment that is more selective in its take-up.

Mr. Morley: I would not disagree with the Minister that those steps will lead to a loss of income. We have consistently said that conservation steps must be taken and a reduction in effort must be made. Earlier today, we discussed set-aside for farmers, which is a form of reduction of methods. In such cases, farmers are compensated quite generously through the EC Commission. The decommissioning scheme has funds, within the Commission, for compensation. Do not fishermen deserve the same consideration?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's analogy between set-aside and fishing reductions is good. Set-aside has been introduced in farming to deal with the problem of surpluses and is costing a great deal for the taxpayer to maintain. In this case, we are dealing with the problem of shortages of fish stocks.

If the hon. Gentleman is arguing that the decommissioning scheme is equivalent to set-aside, a better analogy would be a lay-up scheme. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that, far from improving the position, the decommissioning scheme could make it worse, because it would put money into the industry that could be invested in vessels with a greater capacity to catch fish that were in short supply. The hon. Gentleman must face that.

If the hon. Gentleman's answer to the problem is that the Government should embrace decommissioning as a policy, he may wish to reflect that those EC countries with decommissioning schemes, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, are also covered by the eight-day tie-up rule —to which he took exception—because their decommissioning schemes have not worked and there is still a problem about their fleets' capacity to catch fish.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I still have a number of arguments.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. One at a time, please.

Mr. Forsyth: I shall give way to my right hon. Friend, but it means that several other Members will not have their questions answered.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Did not my hon. Friend hear me refer to combining decommissioning with a strict licensing scheme? If the Government set the rules properly, it would not be necessary for funds used for decommissioning to be recirculated. That does not necessarily follow.

Mr. Forsyth: Far be it from me to take issue with my right hon. Friend, but he might recognise that we already have a strict licensing scheme. As for a decommissioning scheme, my right hon. Friend, in common with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) talked about a well targeted scheme that would work, but there have been few suggestions about how it would work in practice.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: No, I shall not give way to an hon. Gentleman who has only just entered the Chamber.

A decommissioning scheme would not help to conserve stocks. It would be most attractive to the least efficient vessels, which exert little pressure on the stocks. It would result in a large inflow of capital to the industry to modernise the existing fleet, and we could end up with a smaller fleet with greater catching power. The industry needs arrangements under which, by its own decisions, it can adjust better to the operations of the market.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked why, if a boat landed in Mallaig and returned to Orkney, the transit time should not count. The answer is, because the whole point of the eight-day rule is that it is time spent in port when fishing is not taking place. Transit time certainly adds to the time not available for fishing, but the whole point of the scheme is to reduce fishing activity. That is inherent in it and it must be faced.

The hon. Gentleman also said that the gear option did nothing for some boats. I agree that it does not have something for everyone. That is why it is an option, and

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that is why we have made it clear to the Commission that the compulsory 110 mm mesh size is not acceptable. We need a reduction in fishing effort; the eight-day tie-up is one way of achieving it.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked what had happened to the Scottish Fishermen's Federation proposals on conservation, especially the one-net rule. We have pressed the Community to adopt most of the SFF proposals, including the one-net rule, but those proposals do not go far enough. We support the one-net rule, and we have convinced the European Commission of the need for it. For the past year we have been trying hard to persuade other member states of the need for the one-net rule, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister does not appear to be answering my points about the square mesh panel. Why does the Parliamentary Secretary not think that there is enough evidence to justify the conservation benefits of the 90 mm diamond net with the 80mm square mesh panel? Surely trials done by the Sunbeam show that there is some evidence. Does he accept that trials to be conducted later this spring will allow further evidence to be gathered about the 90 mm net with the 80 mm square panel?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is being a little unfair to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary. He said nothing of the sort. We are not free agents in this matter. We have to persuade our colleagues in the Community. As my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) pointed out, the Parliamentary Secretary has done sterling work in arguing the case. The reason why the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland can explain the virtues of the system is that the work has been done in this country; and we are arguing the case with our colleagues. The hon. Gentleman would be the first to argue that we must try to reach a consensus on these and other matters within the Community.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said that the United Kingdom was offering no alternative, but that is to ignore the capacity aggregation scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough said that, under the new scheme, some quotas would be filled but with fewer discards, and I agree. We must maintain landings but kill fewer fish unnecessarily. That goes to the root of our approach in the Community.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that more Scottish boats than vessels of any other Community country were caught by the eight-day rule. Typically, he did not point out that 75 per cent. of United Kingdom haddock is landed in Scotland—two thirds of the entire EC availability. So the responsibility for achieving recovery of the stock lies with the United Kingdom, particularly with Scotland——

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again. I have given way generously, and there are only two minutes left.

Tonight's debate has been about the future of the fishing industry. We have heard much about the need to help fishermen. The best way to do that is to ensure that there will continue to be fish in the sea to be caught. We have taken the lead in the European Community in arguing for new conservation measures. Our scientists have predicted that, if no action is taken this year, half the haddock caught in the North sea will be discarded as too small. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said that that was unacceptable. Catching fish before they reach a decent size and throwing dead fish back into the sea is no way to manage a modern industry.

We continue to press for early action at European Community level to make fishing gear more selective, so that it lets small fish escape. We are also prepared to take the necessary steps at national level to safeguard the stocks in which our fishermen have an interest. The urgent need to conserve fish stocks persuaded the Government to accept the effort limitation scheme and to propose changes in fishing gear. We shall not shirk our responsibility to conserve fish stocks for the long-term good of the industry by adopting policies——

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 37, Noes 99.

Division No. 67] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Madden, Max
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Bellotti, David	Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Morley, Elliot
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	O'Hara, Edward
Cox, Tom	Paisley, Rev Ian
Dewar, Donald	Rooney, Terence
Doran, Frank	Salmond, Alex
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*	Skinner, Dennis
Fearn, Ronald	Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Foster, Derek	Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Haynes, Frank	Wallace, James
Howells, Geraint	Wareing, Robert N.
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*	Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*	Wigley, Dafydd
Johnston, Sir Russell	Wilson, Brian
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*	
Kennedy, Charles	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Livsey, Richard	Mr. A. J. Beith and
Macdonald, Calum A.	Mr. Archy Kirkwood.
Maclennan, Robert	

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan	Evennett, David
Alexander, Richard	Favell, Tony
Amess, David	Fishburn, John Dudley
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Freeman, Roger
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Gale, Roger
Benyon, W.	Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Goodlad, Alastair
Bowis, John	Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Bright, Graham	Gregory, Conal
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'Ps)*	Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick	Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Buck, Sir Antony	Grist, Ian
Carrington, Matthew	Ground, Patrick
Chapman, Sydney	Hague, William
Chope, Christopher	Harris, David
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*	Hawkins, Christopher
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*	Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Cran, James	Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Curry, David	Hind, Kenneth
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*	Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Dunn, Bob	Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Emery, Sir Peter	Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*

Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *Put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House, while recognising the difficulties which may face fishermen as a result of the decisions for fish conservation reached at the latest EC Council of Fisheries Ministers, endorses the need for such measures to safeguard the long-term interests of fishermen themselves by reducing the over-exploitation of certain fish stocks, welcomes the Government's continuing efforts to secure improved conservation measures and congratulates the Government on securing at the last Fisheries Council a package of measures which included the maintenance of the principle of relative stability, continued recognition of the United Kingdom's claims under the Hague Preference and improved flexibility to take our western mackerel quota east of 4° West.

NATURAL HERITAGE (SCOTLAND) BILL [LORDS]

Ordered,

The the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with as if it had been certified by Mr. Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Kashmir (Human Rights)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.12 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to debate human rights in Kashmir.

At a time when the world's attention is focussed on events in the Gulf, it is right for us not to forget those other people who are seeking to establish their own rights and freedoms. Many right hon. and hon. Members have raised the subject of self-determination for the Baltic states, and I share their concern; but I believe that the situation in Kashmir has become a forgotten issue, and I am seeking to rectify that.

It is now some 43 years since the partition of India, but ever since then, Kashmir has been in a state of political limbo. The United Nations has passed resolutions on the region, but has failed to pursue them with any commitment—certainly with the vigour and enthusiasm that characterises more recent Security Council decisions.

The state of Kashmir is of strategic importance, bordering, as it does, Afghanistan, Russia, China, Tibet, Pakistan and, of course, India. Throughout history, it has been subjected to incursions and acts of aggression. After 2,000-odd years of strife and torment, surely it is time that the people of Kashmir had peace and stability in their lives.

Since 1947, there have been sporadic outbursts of internal conflict and strife, and peace-keeping forces have been sent into the area. Nothing that has previously happened compares with the present position. There are more than 250,000 troops in Kashmir, notionally to maintain law and order. The reality, I suspect, is vastly different.

Despite the curfews and censorship imposed by the armed forces, reports of horrific abuses of human rights are coming from the region, including the torture of protesters, looting, rape, arson and murder. While much of the evidence is inevitably anecdotal, the refusal of the authorities to allow access to the International Committee of the Red Cross to investigate these claims points to their validity and substance. Demonstrations in support of self-determination have numbered up to 1 million people. Surely such strength of feeling deserves recognition.

It is important at this stage to point out that these demonstrations are cross-cultural and multi-religious. The population of Kashmir numbers over 10 million. While the majority of the population are Muslim, there are very significant minorities of Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists and other religious groups. Support for the right of Kashmiris to self-determination crosses all religious and cultural boundaries.

We cannot and should not condone violence for its own end—the pursuit of freedom. It is, alas, inevitable that when tensions are high and fear is the prevalent emotion that innocent people are maimed, injured and even killed. It has been estimated that 1·5 million people have fled from the area or are incarcerated in camps in Delhi, Amritsar and Jammu. These events are taking place in Commonwealth countries. That is why I believe that it is the duty of the House to facilitate the ending of these hostilities and atrocities.

[Mr. Terry Rooney]

The current disputes over Kashmir can be traced back to 1947 and the independence of India and Pakistan. Resolutions were passed by the United Nations on 21 April 1948 and 13 August 1948 requiring a plebiscite to be carried out to obtain the views of the Kashmiri people, with the unfortunate restriction that this was to be on whether to accede to India or Pakistan. Despite that limitation, no referendum has ever been allowed. It is to the detriment of all concerned that we have now had 43 years of inertia, of needless suffering of a proud nation and of blind eyes being turned. The convenience of politicians has been allowed to transcend the needs and wishes of Kashmir.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House have condemned the violence in Kashmir and expressed support for the concept of self-determination. Now it is time to translate that support into action. If the Indian Government are unwilling or unable to find a way forward, I suggest that the Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries of all the Commonwealth countries should be called on to mediate and prepare the ground. That must be by way of a plebiscite of the Kashmiri people, with all options on the agenda—that is, remaining part of India, joining Pakistan or forming an independent state. I favour the last, but I do not presume to impose my views on others.

In my home city of Bradford, there are more than 30,000 citizens of Kashmiri origin, many of whom have relatives still living in Kashmir. They are at the moment in complete ignorance as to the health and welfare of these relatives because of the news blackout and the poor state of information. They are denied the opportunity of visiting by the Government's refusal to issue visas. I know that there are thousands of Kashmiris in other parts of the country with the same concern. We also have a duty to them to resolve this issue as speedily and as peacefully as possible.

I believe that it is imperative to investigate the question of abuses of human rights. I call on the Indian authorities to allow Amnesty International to be given free and unhindered access to assess the situation in the unbiased and objective manner for which it is rightly renowned.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend on initiating this debate. Does he agree that it is important that the Indian Government immedately allow Amnesty International to investigate the many allegations about human rights abuses? Will he also confirm that the scale and savagery of the brutality that the people of Kashmir have faced in recent years at the hands of the Indian security forces are comparable to anything that has occurred in Kuwait? Does he agree that it is necessary for the Government to confirm—as they have confirmed in the case of Kuwait and the Baltic states—that the people of Kashmir have a right to determine their future and the destiny of their country on the basis that he has outlined?

Mr. Rooney: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. He also represents an area of Bradford. He has had an opportunity that I have not yet had to visit Kashmir. I have heard—as the House has heard—his first-hand accounts of some of the atrocities in that area. However, I understand that even he, in his mission of good will, was denied access to many areas of the state of Kashmir. Perhaps that gives us a lead to the forces at work in the region.

It is imperative that, wherever possible, we expose any abuse of human rights and any atrocities that man is capable of perpetrating on others. Amnesty International has a record which is second to none. I do not believe that anyone could doubt the integrity of such an organisation. I am worried that it is being denied access in the same way that the Red Cross is being denied access. To me, that is a sign that something extremely serious is happening there, about which the Government and forces in the area do not wish the outside world to know.

Violence is being perpetrated on an enormous scale. That is certain. Where the blame lies need not interest us especially. Blame does not bring anyone back to life, heal injuries, restore lives or give orphans parents. If we are to resolve conflict—the Baltic states and Kuwait have been mentioned, but there are many other areas of the world where conflict exists—we need to do it on a reasoned basis and on the back of sound information. If, for whatever reason, the Government and authorities of India will not allow parliamentary or similar delegations, we must press them to allow Amnesty International to assess the situation and to report back to Governments, to the Commonwealth and to the United Nations, so that progress can be made.

Self-determination is enshrined in article 1 of the United Nations charter. People must be free to determine their own Government, their own life style, their own form of democracy and their own mode of economy. That must be inherent in any civilised society. It is not for other powers to impose their will, by force, by aggression or by any other means. Self-determination must be a basic human right, and must be the basis of any freedom and any democracy. Any self-respecting politician would accept that.

We are constantly told that India is the world's largest democracy, with 1 billion people—perhaps more. There are many turmoils in India and one does not envy the President, the Prime Minister or the Parliament of India their job. Nevertheless, we must tell India that, because of its federal nature, unless it resolves conflicts such as that in Kashmir to the satisfaction of the world community, it will be in danger of tearing itself apart. That would be a tragedy for all of us—especially for all the people of India and for the region generally.

I have received many statements, depositions and reports from all sections of the community. I absolve no one from blame for the violence that is occurring in Kashmir. Some would say that it is entirely the work of Hindus against Muslims—others, vice versa. I do not think that we are in the business of apportioning blame. We are in the business of removing the violence, establishing peace and stability and restoring human rights in the area and allowing a proud people to get on with their lives in a pleasant land. We want to make it an attractive place for people to live, to give children hope for the future and the elderly peace in their last years. The situation in Kashmir has been allowed to continue for far too long —from 1947 to 1991—with little sign of any progress being made.

As part of the Commonwealth, we have a lead role to play. It is right and proper that we should use the good offices of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to impress upon India the need to bring Amnesty

International in as a starting point and then to use diplomatic channels and so on to allow the people of Kashmir a plebiscite so that they can express their wishes and desires for the future of Kashmir. In that sense, they are no different from the people of the Baltic states, the people of Kuwait and the people of all the oppressed nations of the world. The difference is that tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of people of Kashmiri descent have been in prison, and they think that it is about time that we took the same positive action on this difficult state of affairs as has been taken in other arenas.

Recently I received a petition carrying 3,000 signatures. I was intrigued to find that name 137 was that of one John Major. Unfortunately, he lives at Silverhill drive in Bradford, not at No. 10 Downing street.

10.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I have listened with interest to the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) and I congratulate him on bringing the subject of Kashmir before the House again.

We share concern about the violence in Kashmir, the tension it has caused between India and Pakistan—both good friends of Britain—and the need for human rights to be respected. It is, however, important to understand something of the historical background to the problem before considering the present situation.

At the time of Indian independence in 1947, there were some 560 princely states, of which Jammu and Kashmir was one of the largest. A majority of its population were Muslim, but there was a large Hindu community, and also significant Buddhist and tribal minorities. The Maharaja was Hindu.

The rulers of all the princely states were advised to accede to either India or Pakistan. Most did, opting for the country in which their state was situated. At independence, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir had still not opted for either country. However, an uprising among the Muslims of his western territories, supported by irregular forces from the new state of Pakistan, led the Maharaja to sign an instrument of accession to India in October 1947. Pakistan did not accept the decision, and the first war broke out between the two newly independent countries. It continued throughout 1948 until a ceasefire came into effect on 1 January 1949. In July 1949, India and Pakistan agreed a ceasefire line which passed through the territory of the former princely state. That line was subsequently redefined as the "line of control" after the 1971 war.

At the heart of the present disturbances in Kashmir is the long-standing dispute over its status. As the hon. Gentleman reminded the House, India and Pakistan originally agreed to a plebiscite covering the entire princely state, as set out in United Nations resolutions in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The issue was whether Kashmir should accede to India or to Pakistan, not independence. But apart from that, much has happened since then. There have been two wars over Kashmir. The territory of the former princely state has in practice been divided between India and Pakistan by the line of control. In 1972, India and Pakistan reached a fresh agreement at Simla. Under the Simla agreement both countries agreed

"to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed on between them".

Those are words with which many hon. Members will be familiar. Both sides also committed themselves to a

"final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir".

So the earlier agreement to which the hon. Gentleman referred was superseded by the 1972 agreement.

That brief synopsis shows some of the complex background to the Kashmir problem. It also has a bearing on the present violence there. The disturbances over Kashmir which have racked the relations between India and Pakistan ever since their independence are centred on the valley of Kashmir. The Indian constitution gives special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, but the Muslim inhabitants of the valley of Kashmir have felt an increasing dissatisfaction with their situation.

We have consistently condemned those who resort to terrorist tactics for political ends. The bomb and the bullet are no substitute for the ballot box and the democratic process. We support the Government of India in their efforts to deal with the challenge from terrorist violence in Kashmir, but, at the same time, we have urged the Indian Government to try to exercise the greatest restraint in dealing with the serious threat to law and order facing them in Kashmir.

There have been harrowing accounts of what has taken place in Kashmir. We have no way of knowing how reliable such reports are, but we are confident that the Indian Government are trying to prevent such occurrences. However, even if only a small part of the reports is true, it is too much. We condemn abuses of human rights wherever in the world they occur. In relation to Kashmir, we have regularly made clear to the Indian Government our concern that human rights must be respected. In their response, members of the Indian Government have underlined the seriousness of the challenge facing them and the violence committed by the militants, which we acknowledge.

Members of the Indian Government have also assured us of their respect for human rights and their determination to do their best to ensure that human rights are not violated. The Government have instituted a special court in Kashmir to examine complaints against the police. Cases of alleged wrongdoing by the security forces are also reported to be under investigation. We welcome those concrete steps as signs of the Indian Government's intentions, but we shall continue to urge them to practise the utmost restraint in confronting the challenge in Kashmir.

The hon. Member for Bradford, North referred to Amnesty International. As I expect he knows, we welcomed the previous Indian Government's decision to allow members of Amnesty International to go to India for private visits and meetings with the Government. The previous Government of India faced considerable complaint from their Opposition for making that decision. We hope that the present Indian Government will stand by that commitment. We have always commended Amnesty International to that Government, and we hope that Amnesty will soon be able to carry out whatever investigation it has in mind.

India has often claimed that the disturbances it faces in Kashmir could be easily dealt with if the militants were deprived of the support that they receive from within Pakistan. The Pakistan Government deny that they are giving any support, except moral and political support for fellow Muslims in difficulties. Whatever the truth of that,

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

we have also urged the Pakistan authorities to do their utmost to avoid any steps that might appear to confirm India's suspicions.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should point out to the Indian authorities that they are playing into the hands of the militants by not stamping firmly on atrocities against the population of Kashmir? Such acts only serve to cause greater bitterness. It is well known that feelings against the Indian authorities have grown much stronger as the months have gone by and little progress has been made. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be helpful if not only Amnesty International but a group from the House visited the region, with, one hopes, the co-operation of the Indian authorities, to assess the situation and report back to the House?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My hon. Friend's point speaks for itself. The institution by the Indian Government of the special court in Kashmir is in response to the type of argument my hon. Friend has deployed. I can inform my hon. Friend that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) was to visit Kashmir with the agreement of the Indian Government earlier this month, but that trip has had to be delayed because of the conflict in the Gulf.

There is some evidence that there has been a welcome reduction in the level of violence in Kashmir in recent weeks. It is a great tragedy that an area so rich in natural assets, not least the resourcefulness of the people, and outstanding beauty, with which I know that you, Mr. Speaker, and many other hon. Members are familiar, should have been plunged into such serious law and order difficulties.

To find a lasting solution to the long-running problem and bring to an end the violence which distresses us all, it will be necessary first to build up confidence between all those involved. We welcome the series of bilateral discussions currently under way between India and Pakistan about practical confidence-building measures. We also welcome the efforts being made by the present Indian Government to re-establish a political dialogue with the Muslim communities of the Kashmir valley. We hope that those discussions will contribute to the process of finding a solution to the problem of Kashmir.

The House can be assured that we will continue to watch the situation in Kashmir closely and encourage all concerned to resolve the matter peacefully. Only that will bring a lasting end to the recent violence which so saddens all who are friends of India and Pakistan, and of the Kashmiri people.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 15 February 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Badgers Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On the Order Paper for today there are two Bills relating to badgers—the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) and another Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). I trust that, when hon. Members discuss the measure immediately before us, the Chair will permit straying into the other Bill, because comparisons between the two Bills will obviously be the key to what is said.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that we must deal with the Bill before us. It is not for me to pontificate on what Members may or may not say, but they must stick to what is in the Bill. I understand that the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), whose Bill appears lower down the Order Paper today, may also want to participate in this debate, but I have no idea what he will say.

Mr. Colvin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On a second point of order, may I say that the Bill that we are about to debate could have been called the Badgers (Amendment) Bill, because to a great extent it amends the Badgers Act 1973. However, I have just been to the Vote Office and I am afraid that that Act is not available. That may be due to my laziness; I should have ordered it last week so that it could have been brought from the store. However, the same problem confronted us during debates in the last Session on the Protection of Badger Setts Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is all as may be, but today we are dealing with the Badgers Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) seriously wants to look at the Badgers Act 1973, for which I was responsible, may I point out that there are copies of it in the Lobbies.

Mr. Speaker: Let us get on with it.

9.36 am

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is my pleasure and privilege to move the Second Reading of the Badgers Bill. Its sponsors are colleagues from the three principal political parties, and Plaid Cymru has also promised me its wholehearted support.

There is one sad mistake in the list of the Bill's sponsors. I refer to my late hon. Friend and colleague, Mr. Donald Coleman. The Bill had gone to the printers before he so tragically passed away. A bit of secret history is that Donald Coleman would dearly have loved to have introduced a measure similar to my Bill. He was pleased when I invited him to be a sponsor and I am sure that he is with us in spirit today supporting this measure.

When I was telephoned and told that I was fifth on the list for private Member's Bills, my immediate response was to say that I wanted to introduce a Bill to protect badgers, first, because I have an affection for these lovely creatures and, secondly, I was concerned about the way in which a most reasonable Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) had been talked out.

Following my decision, I pay tribute to the organisations that have lent me their support, expertise and invaluable assistance. I refer to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the League Against Cruel Sports, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, the National Federation of Badger Groups and the World Wide Fund for Nature, led by his Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. I also thank the caring people all over Britain who have sent me letters of support, sometimes accompanied by petitions in favour of the Bill. I hope and trust that they will not be disappointed.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning the organisations that have helped him to prepare the Bill. I assume that he consulted them closely. He will recall that last year my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), as a Back-Bench Member, put through the House the Rights of Way Act 1990 which brought together the most amazing collection of environmental, farming and landowning groups. It was a remarkable success for which my hon. Friend has been rightly rewarded by a place in the Government. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not aspire to such a reward. Can he tell the House what other groups he consulted, and will he address the genuine concerns expressed by the National Farmers Union about the difficulties some of his proposals might cause for farmers?

Mr. Hughes: I consulted and spent a good deal of time with a whole host of organisations before presenting the Bill. I can give the hon. Gentleman that clear and specific assurance.

The badger has been protected by law since 1973, but despite strengthening amendments to the Badgers Act 1973 in 1981 and 1985, the cruel persecution of badgers persists. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) steered a private Member's Bill through Parliament in 1985 to make it more difficult for diggers to escape conviction. He recently conducted a survey of police authorities to find out whether the 1985 amendment has been effective and he discovered that, although initially the conviction rate rose dramatically, it has since dropped

[Mr. Hughes]

to a mere 55 per cent. That is a lower rate of conviction than that achieved before the 1985 attempt by Parliament to solve the problem. Badger diggers now know that if they are caught attacking a badger sett they have a 50:50 chance of getting off.

The National Federation of Badger Groups, which represents about 70 voluntary badger protection groups, produced a report about a year ago which showed that badger setts have been attacked with various degrees of severity by terrier men and badger diggers, as well as by a small minority of farmers and some unscrupulous developers. Such people take advantage of the fact that, despite legal protection for the badger, the animal's home, its sett, is not protected.

Early in 1989 a national survey of badger setts conducted by Dr. Stephen Harris for the Nature Conservancy Council supported the claim by the League Against Cruel Sports that up to 10,000 badgers are killed annually by badger diggers. I am sure that hon. Members will realise that when a sett is flattened by a JCB or flooded with slurry it is virtually impossible to obtain prosecution evidence of the injury or death of badgers because the evidence may be deep in an impenetrable tomb. Only last year a farmer was acquitted on appeal because of the absence of physical proof that badgers were present in the sett when it was flooded with slurry. In their eagerness to prevent foxes from using a badger sett to escape from the hounds, some fox hunts use methods of blocking far outside the code of practice of the Masters of Foxhounds Association and that causes severe problems to the resident badgers.

Mr. Colvin: Will the hon. Gentleman therefore acknowledge that the proper earth stopping of badger setts in no way harms the badger if it is carried out in accordance with the code of practice of the Masters of Foxhounds Association? Why did he not provide for that in his Bill?

Mr. Hughes: I hope that, with the co-operation of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, we can accommodate that point in Committee.

My Bill seeks to block the loopholes in existing legislation by protecting the badger sett, the badger's home. Any reasonable person looking at what is happening would feel that such a measure was vital.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): My hon. Friend has been asked why he did not put in the Bill the concession that he has offered. It is as well to explore that issue for a moment because it would be helpful for my hon. Friend to tell the House that he is under pressure not only from fox hunters but from people who want to see 100 per cent. protection for badger setts. If my hon. Friend makes the concession to fox hunters that he has intimidated, he will encounter some resistance from those of us who do not want such a concession to be made. However, if he agrees to make it we shall agree to it. I hope that Conservative Members will accept in good faith what my hon. Friend said. The matter has to be dealt with in Committee. My hon. Friend wants to present the Bill as it is to accommodate our feelings, but we acknowledge that there will have to be concessions in Committee.

Mr. Hughes: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point. I am a reasonable man, and from the outset I have approached this subject in a conciliatory spirit and will continue to do so.

Mr. Colvin: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) for his intervention because it goes to the heart of objections to the previous Bill presented by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I wholeheartedly concur with what the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) said about consultation. He has bent over backwards to meet us and to talk about these issues. However, it was clear from the start that this was one of the sticking points.

I cannot accept that provisions to the end that I have suggested could not have been included in the Bill when it was drafted. They were certainly included in the draft Bill which we let the hon. Gentleman see and which encompassed our suggestions in covering notes. I do not accept the argument that it was not possible. Everything is possible and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the essence of getting private Members' Bills through this place is compromise. Half a cake is better than none, and opponents of what is proposed should accept that a half cake is well worth having.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman seems to expect a 100 per cent. concession. As he knows, there are two sides to this argument. I have received a great volume of correspondence from people all over the country who feel strongly on this issue.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I have a different point from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). On Report I tabled two amendments to the last Bill to deal with the problems of badger setts in sea walls. I had a bad case in my constituency where a sea wall broke as a result of badger activity. I have had many representations from farmers about the problems associated with normal agricultural work. I have studied the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) on a similar subject and the wording of it is quite acceptable. The hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) did not consult me, but must have known of my interest because I tabled amendments to the last Bill. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside that it is not acceptable to put a Bill before the House and then say, "I shall alter it in due course." The hon. Gentleman is the author of this Bill and he must understand that he will get opposition if he does not take account of these points at this stage.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) has already said that I have consulted widely, so there is a difference between him and the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin).

I have here a report in *The Independent*, dated 26 August 1990, of a court case in mid Wales involving badger baiting. A gang of badger baiters was trapped by an anti-blood sports undercover agent, who made a video film of the cruelty. The report said:

"The men dig up a set and a terrier is sent down to drive out the first badger. It writhes and flips as four dogs tear into it, pinioning the animal so tightly that it can barely move its head and bite.

The excited dogs yap constantly. Their owners stand in a circle like children egging on a playground fight. The men's language complements their behaviour".

There follows a series of obscenities which I do not wish to embarrass the House by repeating. The report continues:

"The badger wiggles backwards and forwards, trying to throw the dogs off. It is an impossible task.

The digging out of the second badger begins. As it is forced up, a hunter helps it on its way, throwing it through the air with the dogs hanging off it. The pack is briefly called off and a shotgun is fired twice into the badger. The shots do not kill it so the dogs renew their attack. 'Fight' is an inappropriate description of the killing. The tormented badger does not have a chance . . .

The third badger is pulled out and puts up the strongest resistance. Five dogs, terriers, tear into it. One of the men stabs the badger, to weaken it, not to kill it. The dogs are pulled off so the badger thinks it can escape. But when it gets a few yards, the dogs are unleashed and swarm over it again.

As the struggle drags on, one man . . . casually walks up to the badger and stabs it six times. It survives, so he slits its throat. It takes a minute or so for the dogs to realise the badger is dead and they carry on jerking the body. The hunters are delighted . . . Badger baiting is a crime, but the laws are not tight and successful prosecutions are rare. Mr. Barrington"—

of the League Against Cruel Sports—

"said that the league was pressing the Home Office to make it an offence to dig up the badger sett."

This is what I hope to achieve with my Bill.

There was a sequel to the court case. The five badger baiters were forced to run for their lives after the court hearing. The report said:

"The cowards fled from court after enraged animal lovers had watched a sickening video.

It showed badgers screaming in agony as they were shot, stabbed and baited by terriers."

Reading such gruesome details, it is difficult to believe that we living in a civilised society, let alone a Christian one.

Clause 1 proposes to amend the Badgers Act 1973. It provides:

"( ) If any person shall interfere with a badger sett by doing any of the following things, that is to say,

(a) damaging a badger sett or any part thereof;

(b) destroying a badger sett;

(c) obstructing access to or any entrance to a badger sett;

(d) causing a dog to enter a badger sett; or

(e) disturbing a badger when it is occupying a badger sett

intending to do any of those things or being reckless as to whether his actions will have any of those consequences, he shall be guilty of an offence."

In view of the episodes that I have just read out, I feel that such measures are ever more urgent.

In addition, the Bill protects farmers. If the National Farmers Union is not satisfied with my wording, I am prepared to look at a more acceptable formula. I have no wish to interfere with the legitimate functions of the farmer.

Mr. Colvin: I understand that the hon. Gentleman proposes that farmers be allowed to apply for a licence to interfere with badger setts. Has he thought through the bureaucracy of that? I am a farmer and I know that instant decisions have to be made and one cannot afford to go through a long, tangled bureaucratic process to get a licence to interfere when one is managing a farming operation. Will the hon. Member elucidate the licensing arrangements?

Mr. Hughes: I have had discussions with the National Farmers Union and it seems to be adopting a more reasonable approach than that which the hon. Gentleman is adopting.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Is it not a bit much for Conservative Members to make these excuses and apologies for not supporting the Bill? Would it not be better if people put their views forward honestly and allowed my hon. Friend to amend the Bill in Committee? At this stage of the game, it is a bit sickening to have apologists for the hunting and shooting set raise pathetic excuses such as the problems of bureaucracy so as to impede the progress of the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: I can understand my hon. Friend's feelings. As I said earlier, many people have written to me expressing equally strong feelings.

Clause 4 gives a definition of a badger's sett:

"any structure or place occupied or used by a badger for shelter or protection."

In a letter to me dated 29 January, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who is the chairman of the British Field Sports Society, said that the Bill proposes protection for vacant badger setts, which are often occupied by foxes and rabbits. However, he is not allowing for the fact that badgers often return to a former home and may have vacated the sett only temporarily. Nevertheless, I give him my word that, in Committee, I shall attempt to reach agreement with his organisation. In other words, I shall seek a compromise. I trust that the British Field Sports Society will approach this matter in a conciliatory way. That is the method by which legislation can be enacted to tackle and stamp out this evil practice of badger baiting. My Bill is not a back-door attempt to curb fox hunting.

Mr. David Nicholson: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman say that. I shall revert to farmers' interests because farmers, especially those in the south-west, have land that in some instances is criss-crossed with setts and tunnels, many of which are empty. This has happened because of an increase in the badger population. When the setts and tunnels are empty, they are inhabited by rabbits, which do considerable harm to crops. On occasions, tunnels have collapsed beneath the weight of a tractor or during the disturbance of ploughing, causing injury and damage. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has said that he will consider these matters in Committee.

Mr. Hughes: The appropriate provisions are already in the Bill. If the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill, he will find the answer to his intervention.

In Northern Ireland, the badger and its sett are protected by law. It is time for the anomaly on the mainland to be corrected. I want all badger setts to be properly protected from the minority who continue to persecute a beautiful and harmless wild animal.

10 am

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): I share the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) about the late Donald Coleman. Secondly, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on having been fortunate enough to secure a high place in the ballot. Having also done that, I know that a great deal of work was required. I know that, because over the years I have introduced two private Member's Bills. A great deal of background work has to be done before such Bills can be introduced on the Floor of the House.

At this early stage in my brief remarks I shall say something that may cause surprise and shock. I shall be

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supporting the Bill's Second Reading. I know that that will surprise those who wrote to me following my opposition to the detail, not to the principle, of the Protection of Badger Setts Bill, which was introduced last year by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). These writers were clearly convinced that at best I was in favour of badger baiting and torture, which I am not and which I consider entirely repellant in every respect. At worst, they give the impression in many of their letters that for refreshment I had badger for lunch, tea and dinner, varying my diet only occasionally by turning to baby seals or hamsters.

Some of the 2,000-odd letters that I have received were not unreasonable, but many were entirely unreasonable. That is my view, however, and perhaps I am wrong. I shall quote one which I consider to be unreasonable. It reads:

"I hope all your family die of cancer, you badger-hayting bastard."

That letter was wrong in fact. Almost the worst feature about it was that the spelling was not such as to enable the writer to obtain an O-level in English. Hating was spelt hayting, and perhaps that reflected the ability of the writer to think. The alleged affection of many writers of the letters to which I have referred towards wild animals seemed not to stretch so far as to include affection for homo sapiens. They did not appear to be the caring people to which the hon. Member for Newport, East referred.

I hate to disappoint those who wrote the sort of letter from which I quoted. They believe that I was determined to destroy badgers in one way or another. They must now exercise great intellectual agility to force themselves to believe otherwise.

We could and should have had a badger sett protection Act last year. Such a measure would now be on the statute book if it had not been for the obstinacy of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West and his unpreparedness to meet the legitimate arguments and amendments that were advanced and tabled by a number of hon. Members.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Charles Morrison: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but before I do so I tell him that I shall not necessarily reply to his intervention. I say that because I am still waiting for him to answer a letter that I wrote him after his Bill was defeated last year.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman had an unpleasant experience and I share his concern and the concern of the entire House that people write such letters—I have received many similar letters on matters not connected with badgers—but we must not get over-sensitive. Those who write such letters destroy the validity of the case for the protection of badgers. It is as simple as that. For the hon. Gentleman to make great play of the loonies who write to him—there cannot be that many of them—is to undermine any serious points that he wants to make.

It was unfair of the hon. Gentleman, and untrue, to suggest that I was obstinate. Many concessions were made when my Bill was considered in Committee. It was the determination and selfishness of the fox-hunting lobby that caused the Bill to go down. That is the truth and the hon. Gentleman should recognise it.

Sir Charles Morrison: That is complete rubbish. I was not a member of the Standing Committee that considered the hon. Gentleman's Bill. I understand, however, that fox hunting was debated in considerable detail during those proceedings. But on Report a number of amendments were tabled, such as the one which has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), and were not debated. Time did not permit that, because of the nature of the passage of private Members' legislation. In most instances the amendments were reasonable and would not have undermined the basic intention that lay behind the Bill.

Mr. Wiggin: I recall that I was on the mailing list of the League Against Cruel Sports, which published a pamphlet that included a photograph of my hon. Friend, under which there was an extremely abusive personal attack that was based on prejudice, not fact.

Sir Charles Morrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Newport, East has decided already to try to meet legitimate concerns. Clause 2(2) states:

"A person shall not be guilty of an offence . . . if he shows that his action was unavoidable and was an incidental result of a lawful act."

That is helpful. Nevertheless, the subsection will need amending to meet some of the worries that have been expressed by the National Farmers Union. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman may have received the same letter that was sent to me by the NFU since his negotiations with it. In that letter the NFU raises what appear to be several legitimate concerns. None the less, the hon. Member for Newport, East has taken a considerable step in the right direction and I am grateful to him for that.

We should be as clear about what the promoter and sponsors of the Bill are not attempting to do as we are about what they are trying to do. There are some, not necessarily in this place but outside it, who are somewhat confused. As we all know, the Bill is not an attempt to protect the badger as a species. I think that the hon. Member for Newport, East will agree with me about that. It is important that that is understood, as many of the letters that I have received are from people who, no doubt genuinely, believe that the species is in danger. It is not, and that is why the Bill is specific.

The concept of protecting the species is covered adequately by the Badgers Act 1973, for which the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) must take a good deal of the credit, together with a late cousin of mine, who introduced the Bill in another place. That legislation can also be credited to some extent for the current state of the badger population. Whether that is increasing or decreasing nationally is not certain. However, every opinion expressed or census taken so far implies that badger numbers have increased over a long period.

I make that claim on the basis of information provided in the Nature Conservancy Council publication, "The Badger in Britain" and I shall base my remarks also on the views expressed to me by one of the scientists who wrote that report. It states that as long ago as 1846, the early extermination of the badger was predicted. It was thought to be practically extinct in England. During the late 19th century, many people expressed a similar sentiment. None the less, by 1905, although badgers were somewhat scarce, they were generally distributed, though they were still

thought to be uncommon or rare in many areas of England, and sparsely distributed in Scotland. They were certainly thought to be rarer than 100 years earlier.

In 1948, Ernest Neal, who has probably studied badgers more than anybody else, expressed the opinion that the badger was well distributed and was numerous in parts of Britain. Even so, within a few years there was a setback because of the use of organo-chlorine insecticides, which may have seriously affected badgers, just as they did other forms of wildlife.

Mr. Ron Davies: As the hon. Gentleman said, the badger enjoyed no legal protection prior to 1973. Despite its declining numbers, it was considered a legitimate quarry of many fox hunts, which would include their tally of badgers in their annual reports. Does the hon. Gentleman think in retrospect that that was appropriate behaviour for fox hunters to adopt?

Sir Charles Morrison: I do not know whether it was appropriate for fox hunters to do that prior to 1973, but fox hunters abide by the law and the Bill is aimed at trying to close a loophole in current legislation. That 1973 Act can take some of the credit for the current healthy state of the badger population.

In 1973, the hon. Member for Wentworth estimated that there were 40,000 to 50,000 badgers in Britain, which represented a decline of between 10,000 and 20,000 over the previous four years. The hon. Gentleman's figures were based on the Mammal Society's survey, but he expressed the opinion that the population was probably twice as high as that at the beginning of the century. In 1975, the hon. Member for Wentworth, perhaps on the basis of further analysis by the Mammal Society, estimated that the badger population had declined further, to about 35,000.

The latest survey by the Nature Conservancy Council, initiated with the support of the Mammal Society, estimates that there are approximately 250,000 adult badgers, with an annual production of about 105,000 cubs. It is clear that, in general, there has been a steady increase in badger numbers over the past 150 years. None the less, I emphasise that, although there may be population increases or decreases in various parts of the country, it is not certain whether the national figure is increasing or decreasing. The best scientific methods of assessing numbers are now used, but until they are applied more than once, comparative figures cannot be produced. However, it is clear also that there is no immediate need to worry about the status of the badger population—and, anyway, that is not the subject of the Bill.

There is a tendency for many people to assume that badgers are rare, simply because they are not often seen. Sadly, often the only badgers that we see are dead at the side of the road. It is forgotten that they are largely nocturnal animals. It should also be remembered that badgers are bad colonisers. Whereas an area cleared of foxes outside the breeding system will be populated again within a few weeks, an area made bare of badgers may take years, or even decades, to contain them again.

Against the background of a secure badger population, today's Bill or Bills—because that of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), the Protection of Badgers Bill, has the same objective—are aimed at protecting badger setts specifically. My hon. Friend's Bill seeks to safeguard them

"against acts likely to cause bodily harm to badgers."

The NCC survey estimates that Britain's 250,000 badgers live in no fewer than 42,891 social groups, occupying 165,000 setts. Of those, the council estimates that 9,000 setts are dug each year. It is thought probable that most of the observed cases of digging relate to digging for badgers, not foxes.

Scientists have categorised four different types of sett —main, annex, subsidiary and outlying. The number of main setts is equivalent to the number of social groups. The use of setts by foxes is mostly, though certainly not exclusively, of subsidiary and outlying setts. While I agree totally with the objective of protecting badger setts, a definition could exclude the very smallest type, thus reducing the problems that the Bill might otherwise create for farmers, foresters, fox hunters and other country users.

The scientist partly responsible for the NCC report, to whom the hon. Member for Newport, East referred, informs me that it is not necessary, from a conservative standpoint, to protect every sett, and suggests that an appropriate definition would be

"a structure consisting of three or more entrance holes, and which is currently, or has been, occupied by badgers."

I am interested to note that my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster does not think that such a definition, which slightly reduces the scope of the Bill, is necessary, but I believe that it could meet some of the worries of the National Farmers Union. On the other hand, clause 4 of the Badgers Bill includes a definition, but it is much more comprehensive than my suggestion, which stems precisely from the views expressed by Dr. Stephen Harris. Doubtless we can return to that matter in Committee.

I am struck by the fact that the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster, in two major respects, appears to be much tougher than the Bill that we are debating this morning. First, it suggests a sharp increase in penalties for offences under the Badgers Act 1973. I believe that that is an important provision and I am surprised that the hon. Member for Newport, East does not refer to penalties. Secondly, clause 5 provides in principle to allow courts to disqualify those convicted of offences under the 1973 Act from keeping a dog. That is a pretty tough provision. Those two provisions provide an extra and a major deterrent to badger baiters or diggers, and I am sorry that they are not in the Bill. I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East may be prepared to include them.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that the Criminal Justice Bill contains certain new provisions—perhaps the Minister could enlighten us about them—that cover his remarks about penalties?

Sir Charles Morrison: In that case, I seek to be enlightened. No doubt my right hon. Friend the Minister will deal with that from the Front Bench in due course.

I am also a little disappointed—perhaps I am wrong again—that the hon. Member for Newport, East does not include provision for controlled blocking of badger setts by fox hunters. My scientific advice is that setts could be blocked with loose soil and that such plugs could be left for badgers to remove. Alternatively, provision could be made for setts to be blocked by faggots or small logs, but they would have to be removed in the evening after a hunt.

A number of matters will have to be discussed in greater detail in Committee, but I am encouraged by the flexibility

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that the hon. Member for Newport, East has demonstrated and as a result of that and of continuing goodwill, I feel that there is a strong chance that the Bill will in due course become an Act of Parliament.

10.22 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison), who based his argument and assessment on the conservation standpoint. That is a legitimate view and it is from that standpoint that, on occasion during the past 10 or 15 years, he has been a sponsor of attempts to improve the law.

The conservation argument is still valid. I take the view that the estimate of a badger population of 250,000 is on the high side. The hon. Gentleman quoted that estimate from the Nature Conservancy Council. In any case, that would be the number at the peak of the year. By early or mid February, just before cubs are born, the badger population is inevitably much lower, because of persecution and substantial losses on British roads, than it was 11 months earlier.

My presence here today is impelled not merely by the conservation argument, but by the moral argument—the question whether it is tolerable in British society today that people should behave as those who dig badger setts have behaved during the past 10 or 20 years.

I studied badgers before I became a Member of Parliament and I did not have any intention of pursuing the protection of badgers when I entered the House. However, the setts that I watched in the 1960s were assaulted in the early 1970s by people who can only be described as thugs.

When I discovered that people had put gin traps at the side of a badger sett close by the side of a school nature trail in our area in 1973—gin traps which might well have hurt the badger but could also have taken fingers from children—I decided that it was clear that I had to take action. That is why my Bill, which became the Badgers Act 1973, was presented. I had hoped that that would do the trick. It provided for protection by all except authorised persons and usually thug badger diggers are not authorised, and it made the use of badger tongs illegal, which should at least have made it impracticable for anyone to take them out. However, baiting continued, in part because we are dealing with determined people who have no compunction and no conscience and because it is a rural problem. I accept that one cannot station a police officer by the side of every badger sett to provide permanent protection.

When I was fortunate enough to draw first place in the 1974 ballot and we proceeded in 1975 with the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Bill, we improved the situation a little more. Some hon. Members present this morning attended debates on that measure. However, it was still not enough. In 1981, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) explained, there was a further improvement when the 1975 Act and a number of other pieces of legislation were taken into the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. We then hoped that we might have resolved the problem, but it was not to be.

The diggers continued in their brutal and barbarous way. From time to time when they were caught they were let off by the courts on the ground that they pleaded that they did not know that badgers were in the sett. That led me to suggest that, just as police forces have road safety and crime protection officers with special responsibilities, we needed the appointment of an officer in every police force who would take responsibility for conservation matters. He would not have to have encylopaedic knowledge, but he would need to know to whom he should turn to obtain information that would allow conservation to be properly pursued in his area. Some forces have proceeded in that way.

I have been grateful to the South Yorkshire police in recent years because their approach has been intelligent and effective and has led to two prosecutions of badger diggers, one in the metropolitan borough of Rotherham, in which my constituency lies, and the other next door in Doncaster. One of those convictions was followed by an appeal which was unsuccessful. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East pointed out, too many of these people are getting off and continue to have the right to subject their terriers to what is often a cruel and fatal experience.

I am especially concerned about the morality of the issue. The badger may survive in most parts of Britain, although in some areas close to conurbations—for example, in South and West Yorkshire—there has been a dramatic reduction in the population. However, the activity that the badger digger undertakes must be brought to an end. We stopped cock fighting, bear baiting and dog fighting in the 19th century, yet there has been a resurgence of dog fighting as a result of the importation of pit bull terriers, and in the past decade activities and practices have developed that are clearly utterly unacceptable and intolerable.

I have been delighted that, when the police have brought prosecutions for dog fighting, the courts have frequently awarded the tougher sentences which are entirely justified. I was delighted when one of my constituents was severely punished for indulging in such disgusting activity. I would expect any others engaged in such activity to receive the same sanction.

I see no difference between the crime committed by the dog fighter and that which is indulged in by the less responsible and more sadistic terrier men. For example, one badger dug in South Yorkshire a little while ago had its front paws chopped off so that the terriers would have a more evenly matched struggle. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House are well aware of some of the more pernicious and evil acts which have been committed as part of the process of badger baiting.

I do not wish to start a competition as to who can tell the most disgusting stories of badger baiting. The fact is that odious and obscene barbarism and cruelty have persisted longer than hon. Members on both sides of the House who supported the 1973 Act expected. The House can no longer ignore its responsibility to ensure that we have some standards of civilised conduct in Britain.

There is one further argument. During the past 10 years I have changed my view. I sought to protect individual species and several species have been protected. I have now come to the conclusion—and many hon. Members share my view—that there is little use in Parliament protecting species if it does not properly protect habitats. That is one

reason why I was delighted to play a part in seeking the implementation of the Berne convention on wildlife and habitat.

We are approaching a critical position in Britain and the need to protect badger setts is an illustration of it. There is scarcely an estuary in the British Isles which is not under threat from development. Numerous species have disappeared, through either development or technological and scientific change in our society. The last dolphin to be born in Welsh coastal waters died last year. It was found during the post mortem to be riddled with PCBs and other chemical substances.

The warning signal came in answer to a series of written questions which I asked in the House in December. I asked whether the Secretary of State for the Environment was satisfied with the adequacy of regulations for the protection of our environment. The Minister professed himself adequately satisfied. I then asked the Minister how many sites of special scientific interest had been damaged or destroyed in each of the previous three years and if he would state the area of land in those sites so damaged or destroyed. Hon. Members can read in the *Official Report* of 10 December 1990 that in 1987 more than 100 such sites were damaged or destroyed. In 1988 more than 200 and in 1989 more than 300 such sites were damaged or destroyed. In 1989 alone, the area of land damaged or destroyed within the SSSIs amounted to more than 90,000 hectares —over 0·25 million acres—of land which the present and previous Governments had acknowledged must be protected.

Yet, whenever a private Member's Bill is introduced which would prevent damage to the environment, every member of the Treasury Bench and all Conservative Members behind them go trooping through the Lobbies. That is why I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East for introducing a Bill, which Conservative Members dare not block, and which seeks to ensure that the badger remains in areas such as mine where the population is not high and people like me wish to continue to enjoy something of our natural heritage.

As I have said, I am a conservationist and I am interested in protecting the habitat. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East will accommodate hon. Members who table legitimate amendments. Conservative Members will be aware that I am not particularly eager to see fox hunting abolished by law. I have an entirely different approach. I recognise that the landscape of Britain was formed in the interests of both agriculture and field sports. Hedges, ponds and small woods were all put there to assist shooting.

I have made numerous efforts in the past decade to protect hedgerows but the Government have always blocked them. *[Interruption.]* I note that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) supported the Government's view. The Government will not allow hedgerows to be protected. As we do not need to produce more food from the land, hedgerows should be protected, together with ponds and copses. That might well be welcomed by the field sports interests. But I suggest that in the fox hunting shires of England it would be appropriate to have a minimum hedge height of about 8 ft 6 in. I say that advisedly. If the fox hunting interest sought to block my Bill to protect hedgerows, we should pursue that proposal with considerable enthusiasm. It may be a little hard on the horse, but I would not shed any tears about human casualties, especially if the costs incurred by private health interests were increased.

My job is not to protect Conservative Members of Parliament. I have no wish to protect people of that ilk. But we seek to protect the badger, which is attractive, useful and ornamental. It is far more useful than the vast majority of Conservative Members. I do not need to say more. The badger must be protected. We cannot complete the wall of protection that some of us hoped would be insurmountable when the 1973 Act was passed unless we accept my hon. Friend's Bill. I hope that it becomes law.

10.36 am

Mr. Norman Miscampbell (Blackpool, North): I wish to make a short speech to congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on introducing the Bill and to wish it well. I recognise the flexibility of which he spoke and which he has written into the Bill in clause 3 which amends the Badgers Act 1973. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his approach.

The hon. Member for Newport, East said that he was worried that there was only a 55 per cent. conviction rate. That is about six percentage points higher than we achieve at the Old Bailey, but it is certain that if the Bill is passed without being changed beyond recognition it will increase the conviction rate beyond belief.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Of course, one of the reasons why the Bill might increase the rate of conviction beyond belief is that many innocent people would be caught, prosecuted and wrongly convicted.

Mr. Miscampbell: Naturally, I hope that that is not the result, but I will pay attention to that danger.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Is not the real reason why there will be more convictions that the evidential requirements will be appreciably reduced and therefore convictions will be achieved as a result? Is not that the reason, rather than that which the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) suggests?

Mr. Miscampbell: As I understand it, the problem at present is that there is a let-out. People simply say either that there were no badgers there or that they were digging for some other animal, probably a fox. That is why I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East on dealing with the problem by protecting the setts rather than seeking to protect the species.

I wish to make one distinction. For those of us who take part in certain field sports, it is often difficult to condemn other field sports. I fish, and I make it perfectly plain that nothing on earth would make me vote against other legitimate field sports while I continue with my passion.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East on proposing to increase the penalties. The fact that imprisonment of offenders will now be available is an important change. It puts teeth into the Bill. That will be done by means of an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill which is going through the House.

Many of the offences that come before the courts are not premeditated. They are spontaneous or happen by chance. In such cases one is not seeking draconian penalties. In this instance, however, the offence arises in the most premeditated way. Having looked for setts, people go out with dogs and implements. It is the most

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premeditated crime that I can think of. I hope that the courts will deal with offenders, bearing that in mind. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his Bill.

10.40 am

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I am here today as a badger lover and conservationist. There are few farms in my constituency. I knew that there would be opposition from the farming community, so I gave the Bill to two farmers who live close to the constituency that I represent. When they had read it, both said that it seemed to be very reasonable—that they understood its aims and that they could support it. Other hon. Members speak with more experience of the subject. I speak as a badger lover.

My love for the badger goes back many years. I was one of those children who read about Rupert Bear and Bill Badger. The writers of children's books have the foresight, which parliamentarians do not seem to have, to want to make children appreciate wildlife animals such as the badger. I hope that those children who read about characters such as Bill Badger will learn to appreciate what a good and great creature the badger is. That is happening in wildlife parks. Children look through glass at badger setts and the activities in them. That is to be welcomed. One hopes that they will go on to understand how to treat the wildlife of this country.

The previous Bill that was introduced to protect the badger was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). In Committee he attempted to obtain approval for the Bill, but his attempt was unsuccessful. My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) is a sponsor of the Bill that we are debating and hopes to be here later today. For those reasons, I wish to take part in the debate at this point.

The badger is a fine animal. I am appalled when I read reports of some of the things that happen and when I watch television programmes about the badger informing the public about what really happens. We must speak out against such cruelty. The badger is persecuted in many ways. During the past 14 years the persecution has increased immensely. Prosecutions of badger baiters have been few and far between. There were 17 in 1974 and 74 in 1990, but only 41 people were found guilty. Those who were found guilty seemed to be very unrepentant. If the legislation is tightened up, by means of the Bill, I hope that it will lead to the preservation of this beautiful animal. Last year, between 9,000 and 10,000 badgers were killed by badger hunters. Hunting on that scale could in time lead to the badger becoming an endangered species. In South Yorkshire, the badger population has almost been extinguished. The badger population is also declining in Derbyshire.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman has read the brief and the newspaper articles and has picked up the figures that are bandied about regarding the number of badgers that are killed through badger baiting and badger digging. However, he must think carefully before he quotes figures in this place. Figures quoted in the *Official Report* of the House of Commons are often quoted outside and regarded almost as the Bible. The hon. Gentleman must know his figures are disputed. I do not accept them. All I would say is that if one badger is dug and baited, it is one too many. We should leave it at that. The badger is not an endangered species.

Mr. Fearn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I hope that figures quoted in the House will be repeated many times outside it. Three reports led me to quote those figures. Three reports are better than one. If a fourth report about those figures goes out from *Hansard*, I shall appreciate it.

The number of badgers that have been killed by hunters is known. I suspect that it is in excess of 9,000 to 10,000. The fact is that 210,000 people signed a petition against badger baiting. Such a number cannot be ignored. The RSPCA and other organisations asked people to sign petitions and to write to their Members of Parliament. That number amounts to massive support for the view that the badger should be protected and that badger baiting should cease altogether. I am one of those 210,000 people. Many other hon. Members have also signed the petition.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Support for the badger is widespread. It might be thought that support for the badger would come from people living in the country. I represent about the most urban constituency in Britain, yet I have received just as many letters about this issue as about any other. I am sure that that applies to all right hon. and hon. Members, no matter what their geographical base. I hope that my hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) and all those of us who say that further legislation is needed will make it clear that it will be absolutely unacceptable for any right hon. or hon. Member, by whatever procedure, to block the Bill by preventing it from going today into Committee and, later, on to the statute book. That would go against public opinion and overwhelming evidence that further legislation is needed.

Mr. Fearn: I thank my hon. Friend for his telling intervention.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) spoke of badgers digging into the sea wall and sea-front developments. That occurred in Southport, but the local authority and the small farming community were aware of the danger and alerted people to it.

I have been sickened by some reports that I have read on the treatment of badgers. Derbyshire police say that the going price for a live badger is £500. I must believe the figures provided by Derbyshire police. A report in *The Field* says:

> "When badgers are caught, they are either chained by the leg or put in a pit, from which they cannot climb out, while a succession of dogs is set on them. An horrific film of this was recently shown on television where the bait lasted for a hour and the badger eventually became so exhausted that it was 'revived' by a spectator throwing large stones at it. The film is now in the hands of the Derbyshire police, who are using it to make an instructional video."

Children should not see such films, but they should receive the widest possible publicity. I wish Derbyshire police well in showing that video; this practice must stop.

I am speaking this morning because I feel so strongly about protecting the badger. I felt on reading the Bill, and we read many private Members' Bill, that it is a sensible and sane Bill which we should all support.

10.51 am

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn). I am sure that the House took due note of his comments and of the reservations that I expressed about the figures that he quoted.

The hon. Member spoke on behalf of the Liberal Democrats this morning, but may I use this opportunity to pay tribute to the work that his hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) did on the Protection of Badger Setts Bill, which was introduced in the last Session by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). That Bill had a fairly rough ride in its three Committee sittings, but many constructive amendments were made, largely as a result of the quick thinking of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. Manuscript amendments and so forth were flying around the Committee Room with such speed that sometimes it was difficult to keep track of what was happening.

The Bill was much improved in Committee, although perhaps it still was not quite good enough. I hope that this Bill will be passed to a Standing Committee and I do not intend to try to block it. I wish it well and hope that it will be given a Second Reading. I do not believe that any hon. Member will try to stop it. I hope that it, too, will be as constructively amended in Committee as was the Protection of Badger Setts Bill.

Having listened to the speeches made this morning, I was struck most by the speech of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). I pay tribute to his campaigning vigour on conservation matters. I accept the moral argument for the Bill. Yes, there are details on which we differ, but they can be sorted out. I confess that it was music to my ears to hear his comments on field sports. There is no doubt that it is essential to preserve our natural heritage and the countryside, which was largely created by man. The field sports lobby is in the forefront of that and I endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments on it. I should love us to be able to make hedgerow preservation orders, as we are able to impose tree preservation orders, because anything that helps to preserve the countryside helps to preserve the habitat that the badger so enjoys.

It is significant that the badger population is low in East Anglia. That is held to be largely due to the deprivations of gamekeepers and others, but I suspect that it is much more to do with the fact that land owners and farmers have ripped out hedges to create far bigger fields in the interests of greater economies in farming. I join the hon. Member for Wentworth in his campaign, as I know he will join those who campaign for the preservation of field sports.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on introducing the Bill and on his good fortune in drawing a high place in the ballot. He proposed his Bill concisely and thoughtfully. I also congratulate and thank him for his willingness to consult hon. Members who have strong interests in ensuring that the Bill gets on the statute book in the right form. I associate myself with his remarks on the late Donald Coleman, whom it is good to see as a sponsor of the Bill. I am sure that he is with us in spirit in the debate.

The hon. Member for Wentworth made a further point that is relevant to the debate, and in a sense it is related to a remark made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, who said that he represents probably the most urban constituency in the country, yet his constituents write to him saying that the badger must be protected. That is interesting, because the hon. Member for Wentworth said that the badger populations are under most threat near big conurbations. Fox hunts do not operate in suburbs around big conurbations, so to associate any depletion in badger stocks with fox-hunting activities might be dangerous, but I take the point, which was well made by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Gentleman's assumption may be justified except that the badger diggers who damage and kill off badgers close to conurbations are sufficiently mobile to move further out into rural Britain, at which point their activities become extensive as well as deplorable. Those who live in more remote areas should not imagine that they are free from the attentions of those individuals.

Mr. Colvin: I take that point, which is why I should like legislation not only to enable courts to inflict heavy fines, and perhaps imprisonment, on people found guilty of digging and baiting badgers but to confiscate dogs and vehicles so that they could not do precisely what the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. Ron Davies: May I put to the hon. Gentleman the detail that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) mentioned on the court case in Brecon? Three of the defendants came from inner Manchester and travelled down to Brecon in mid-Wales, where they met the terrier men of the local hunt. People from the inner city, who had been engaged in horrific dog fighting, and the terrier men of the local hunt—a fearful combination—got together to do their damage.

Mr. Colvin: That is a valid point. There are rotten apples in all sorts of barrels.

We are discussing a private Member's Bill. I should like to comment on the nature of such legislation, because that is relevant to our discussion. To succeed, a private Member's Bill must have all-party support and there is no doubt that the Bill has that. A private Member's Bill must also have Government support, or at least the Government must not be opposed to it. We have heard of the so-called payroll vote and have seen what can happen to measures that the Government think are inadvisable. A private Member's Bill must also have general appeal outside the House. Last Session, during the passage of my Computer Misuse Bill, I initially thought that people would not be particularly interested in it, but then I found that they were. I received a large postbag of mail and people stopped me in the high street in Romsey to say, "That is a good Bill." I am sure that when the hon. Member for Newport, East returns to his constituency at the weekend, people will stop him to say, "Well done." We say that too.

Another essential ingredient is that a private Member's Bill must not excite the opposition of a minority. That is where the Protection of Badger Setts Bill, introduced by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, went wrong. During the passage of the Computer Misuse Bill, I was opposed by minorities on both sides of the political spectrum—one minority felt that computer crime laws infringed human rights and, at the other extreme, another minority felt that I had not gone nearly far enough and

Mr. Atkins: The recommendations of the review report "Sport and Active Recreation in the Inner Cities" are being considered as part of the Government's wider review of sports policy. We expect to announce our conclusions in the summer.

Nuclear Physics

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the amount of the Science and Engineering Research Council's budget devoted to nuclear physics in each of the last five years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* constant terms.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Gross expenditure by SERC's nuclear physics board over the last five years is as follows:

	Cash terms £ million	*Constant terms £ million*
1986-87	71,152	92,486
1987-88	83,377	102,778
1988-89	84,297	96,844
1989-90	77,982	84,220
[1]1990-91	62,052	62,052

[1] Forecast outturn (Excludes Laboratories Directorate expenditure previously attributed to Nuclear Physics Board).

Veterinary Schools

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the capital cost of bringing the animal accommodation of veterinary schools at universities up to the standard laid down in Home Office regulations.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is for each university to determine how best to respond to the new code within the resources at its disposal from the Universities Funding Council and elsewhere.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what financial provision has been earmarked for the upgrading of animal accommodation at university veterinary schools in each of the next three financial years; and whether this provision is contained within block grant or capital provision.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The expenditure plans announced on 8 November provided an extra £10 million a year for capital spending by the Universities Funding Council. The increased total allowed for additional equipment for teaching and necessary improvements to animal houses. The distribution of aggregate capital and recurrent funds among universities is a matter for the council, which will announce its allocations for 1991-92 later this month.

DEFENCE

Helicopter Noise (Insulation Grants)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are used for the provision of helicopter noise insulation grants to houses in the vicinity of RAF Cottesmore, Leicestershire.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no helicopters based at RAF Cottesmore. The noise insulation grant scheme in operation is based on fixed-wing flying.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are used for the provision of helicopter noise insulation grants to houses in the vicinity of the helicopter landing site at Bessbrook, County Armagh.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Householders in the vicinity of the helicopter landing site at Bessbrook are eligible for noise insulation grants if their homes are subject to noise levels of 70dB(A) averaged over a 12-hour period. The contour which determines the boundaries of the scheme was originally predicted by computer model. Subsequent on-site noise measurements by the university of Ulster, which followed the normal convention of counting the total number of movements in a 24-hour period within the 12-hour average, produced a contour of smaller radius. Nevertheless the computer-predicted contour remains as the boundary for the noise insulation grant scheme.

Bloodhound Missile

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current state of readiness of the Bloodhound surface-to-air missile system;

(2) what is his policy towards the retention of the Bloodhound surface-to-air missile system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. and learned Member.

War Pensioners Welfare

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number of interviews carried out by War Pensioners Welfare staff in the last three years for which figures are available; and how many of these were at the request of the pensioner concerned.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is in the table.

	Total number of interviews by war pensioners' welfare staff	*Number of interviews at pensioners' request*
1988	41,229	27,793
1989	43,223	27,481
1990	43,672	27,288

SOCIAL SECURITY

Senior Citizens

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the current average weekly income of senior citizens who are totally dependent on the retirement pension and income support.

Miss Widdecombe: Very few pensioners are dependent on retirement pension and income support alone; income support beneficiaries automatically qualify for the maximum community charge benefit payable; those who are tenants also qualify for maximum housing benefit. In addition, income support recipients are exempt from national health charges, such as those for prescriptions or dental services.

Information on the community charge benefit and housing benefit in payment to people in receipt of both

retirement pension and income support is not available. It is therefore not possible to provide an estimate of the actual weekly income of this particular group.

In May 1989, the last date for which information is available, the average weekly payment of retirement pension and income support combined, net of the other benefit payable, was £75·39[1] for couples and £53·31[1] for singles. The average payment of housing benefit to pensioner households overall, for example, those in which either the claimant or the partner received retirement pension but not necessarily income support, was £19·50 per week.

[1] These figures represent the average income of those people who receive both income support and retirement pension (in all its derivatives) but have no other income or capital.

European Directives

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the European directives which have been implemented by his Department since 1979 and those outstanding.

Mr. Jack: The Department has the main responsibility for legislation arising from only two directives:

Council directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security; and

Council directive 86/378/EEC of 24 July 1986 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes.

The necessary legislation was enacted timeously.

Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total percentage of pensioner units whose income does not exceed £5,000, at current prices, for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

Proportion of Pensioner Units with Income not exceeding £5,000 per annum at 1990 prices

Year	*Percentage*
1978	64·9
1979	67·1
1980	66·1
1981	62·1
1982	60·3
1983	54·1
1984	55·8
1985	54·1
1986	52·2
1987	51·1

Income Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much income support has been paid to claimants in *(a)* private nursing home care, *(b)* private residential home care, *(c)* public nursing home care and *(d)* public residential care homes in the last 10 years (i) in total and (ii) as an average per claimant.

Miss Widdecombe: The annual expenditure and the average expenditure per claimant for private residential care and nursing homes since 1981 for people claiming income support/supplementary benefit are in the table:

Year	*Annual expenditure (nearest £ million) residential care homes*	*Average per claimant £*	*Annual expenditure (nearest £ million) nursing homes*	*Average per claimant £*
December 1981	23	1,769	—	—
December 1982	39	2,438	—	—
December 1983	104	4,000	—	—
December 1984	200	4,762	—	—
December 1985	259	4,702	89	5,933
February 1986	328	4,686	131	6,550
May 1987	438	5,214	233	7,281
May 1988	556	5,398	322	7,318
May 1989	658	5,529	447	7,982
May 1990	740	5,920	530	8,281

Notes:

1. Prior to December 1985 the figures are not sufficiently reliable for the total to be subdivided into residents in residential care homes and nursing homes, and therefore only the overall total has been given.
2. Figures for December 1981-1984 are taken from the annual statistical inquiry, figures for December 1985-May 1990 are taken from the quarterly statistical inquiry.

Information regarding amounts paid to people in publicly owned homes (Part III) is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* for the country as a whole and *(b)* for the Nottingham offices (i) the number of claims for industrial injuries disablement benefit lodged during each of the past 10 years, (ii) how many claims were accepted and (iii) what has been the total amount paid out in such benefits.

Mr. Scott: The available information is as follows:

(i) Disablement Benefit Claims—Great Britain—1980-89

Year	*Total claims (thousands)*
1989	102
1988	87
1987	100
1986	122
1985	119
1984	107
1983	121

Year	Total claims (thousands)
1982	115
1981	116
1980	126

After 1986, claims were necessary to establish entitlement to Reduced Earnings Allowance where Disablement Benefit is itself not payable because assessed disablement is less than 14 per cent.

(ii) Information on the number of claims accepted is not available.

The figures below are for the number of initial assessments of disablement in the year they were first paid. Initial awards of gratuities are available until 1986-87 only.

Initial Disablement Assessments

Year	Disablement Gratuities (thousands)	Disablement Pensions (thousands)
1989-90	n/a	n/a
1988-89	n/a	7
1987-88	n/a	10
1986-87	6	5
1985-86	53	6
1984-85	53	6
1983-84	58	6
1982-83	56	7
1981-82	65	6
1980-81	65	7

Figure for 1986-87 covers the period 1 October 1986 to 4 April 1987.

(iii) Total benefit expenditure estimates for disablement benefit only are not available. The figures below include expenditure on reduced earnings allowance.

Industrial injuries benefit expenditure 1980-81 to 1989-90

Year	£ (million)
1989-90	470
1988-89	451
1987-88	453
1986-87	440
1985-86	407
1984-85	381
1983-84	369
1982-83	343
1981-82	315
1980-81	282

Disablement benefit claims received in Nottingham offices

Year	Total claims[1]
1990-91[2]	693
1989-90	966
1988-89	1,052
1987-88	1,207
1986-87	1,647
1985-86	1,786
1984-85	1,486

[1] Offices at Castlegate, David Lane, Shakespeare Street and Station Street.

[2] Figures to December 1990 only.

Note: Figures of claims made are retained at local offices for only six years. Figures relating to claims accepted and the amount paid in disablement benefit at Nottingham offices are not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the countries visited by each of the Ministers in his Department since he became Secretary of State, with the topics discussed in each country.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is as follows:

Country	Topics discussed
Secretary of State	
United States of America	Family maintenance systems
Minister of State	
United States of America	Disability
France	Disability
Former Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Mrs. Shephard)	
Germany	Social Charter, Occupational Pensions operational matters
Portugal	Pension age, Social Charter, standards, use of IT in social security context
Belgium	Discussions on Social Charter with EC Social Affairs Commissioner Discussions on pensions age and Social Charter with Belgium Ministers
Ireland	EC Presidency—social affairs proposals
Ireland	Informal Social Affairs Council
Belgium	Speech to Social Services Committee of the Senate and meeting at National Labour Council
France	Visit to European Parliament, Strasbourg—general discussion
Italy	Forthcoming EC Presidency—Social Affairs proposals
Egypt	Invited by Egyptian Minister Egyptian situation discussed
Italy	Informal Social Affairs Council
Luxembourg	Forthcoming EC Presidency—Social Affairs proposals
Belgium	Speech to Ligue de Familles

Agencies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on progress on the conversion of his Department's regions into agencies.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has so far established two agencies, the Resettlement Units executive agency in May 1989 and the Information Technology Services agency in April 1990. The Social Security Benefits agency and the Contributions agency are planned to be implemented in April 1991. The White Paper "Children Come First", CM 1264, announced the proposed setting up of the child support agency in early 1993.

The aim of introducing agencies is to enable the Department to provide a better quality of service to its customers by the introduction of more effective and efficient management.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to propose changes to the mobility allowance to ensure that it would apply to anyone made immobile after their 66th birthday.

Mr. Scott: We have no such plans.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on levels of overpayment of housing benefit by local authorities; and what guidance is issued by his Department in such cases.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information shows that in 1988-89, 475 out of 483 local authorities in Great Britain identified overpayments amounting to £213 million. This includes overpayments arising through fraud and claimant or administrative error. Guidance on all aspects of overpayments is included in the housing benefit guidance manual issued by this Department. This is supplemented by the issue of circulars as appropriate. Officials also advise authorities by telephone and in writing in individual cases.

SERPS

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy towards the review or abolition of the incentives for people who have already opted out of SERPS.

Miss Widdecombe: Sections 3 and 7 of the Social Security Act 1986 restrict entitlement to the 2 per cent. incentive for members of personal pensions and new occupational schemes to a period before 6 April 1993. The Secretary of State has a statutory duty to review the terms of the contracted-out rebate at intervals of not more than five years and this will be done on receipt of a report by the Government Actuary.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy towards those who, having opted out of SERPS, seek to return to SERPS when the incentives to opt out end.

Miss Widdecombe: There are no restrictions on an individual who is a member of an occupational or personal pension scheme rejoining SERPS at any time.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the cost to the taxpayer of the opting out from SERPS.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 20 December 1990 at column *316*.

War Pensions Office, Swansea

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about proposals to close the war pensions office in Swansea; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: No representations have been received, but there have been a number of local inquiries about the future of the Swansea war pensioners welfare office. The matter was also discussed at a meeting of the Dyfed and West Glamorgan war pensions committee in December 1990. The proposal was one of a number of recommendations about the location of war pensioners welfare offices made in the report of a routine management inspection of the war pensioners welfare service carried out last year. The recommendations are being considered, but no decisions have yet been taken. Any proposals for change which may emerge will be discussed fully with the central advisory committee on war pensions, and local war pensions committees will have an opportunity to comment. The interests of war pensioners and war widows will be safeguarded and we shall ensure that the effectiveness of the welfare service is fully maintained.

Census Officers

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any proposals to amend the unemployment benefit entitlement regulations so as to allow unemployed persons to apply for the position of assistant census officer without disadvantaging their financial position.

Mr. Jack: An unemployed person, in receipt of benefit, will be subject to the normal earnings rules if he becomes an assistant census officer.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 February 1991

ENERGY

Sellafield (Fire)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the fire at the non-operational plant at the Sellafield nuclear fuel reprocessing site in west Cumbria on Tuesday 29 January; and if he will set up an inquiry into its cause.

Mr. Wakeham: I understand that during remedial maintenance work on a non-operational building at British Nuclear Fuels plc's Sellafield site, sections of asbestos were in the process of being removed and replaced by plastic coated metal cladding. Tarpaulins had been erected in order to make the building weatherproof. A contractor was using oxy-acetylene equipment to remove a metal rail when sparks from the equipment caused part of the tarpaulin to catch fire.

The Sellafield site fire brigade successfully dealt with the fire. The Cumbrian county fire service also attended.

Although no radioactivity was involved monitoring checks were carried out purely as a precaution. They confirmed that no release of radioactivity had taken place.

I understand that an inquiry has been convened by BNFL which will involve staff and trades union representatives. The regulatory authorities and local liaison committee were informed of the fire and a press release was issued in accordance with incident reporting procedures.

Waste-derived Fuels

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has for further research into the development of waste-derived fuels.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department's plans for the development of renewable energy sources including waste derived fuel were laid out in energy paper 55 "Renewable Energy in the UK: The Way Forward", copies of which are in the Library of the House. I expect to review our strategy during the coming year.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Wakeham: The Department's policy in all the premises it occupies is to ensure that non-smokers have the opportunity to work in a smoke-free area. The operation of the policy is regularly reviewed in consultation with staff.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, by constituency, existing combined heat and power schemes; and if he will show whether they are *(a)* 0 to 500 kW, *(b)* 500 kW to 10 MW, *(c)* 10 MW to 100 MW, or *(d)* over 100 MW.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department's current estimate is that there are about 500 sites in the United Kingdom using CHP plant with a total capacity of some 2,000 MW. Of this total 1,800 MW is comprised of schemes of over 500 kW, located on 120 sites in industry. The remainder comprises smaller schemes in public and commercial buildings.

The Director General of Electricity Supply has a duty under the Electricity Act 1989 to gather information on generating plant. The Office of Electricity Regulation—OFFER—is, in conjunction with industry, in the process of compiling a database of CHP projects operating in Great Britain. The detailed information requested by the hon. Member should be available from OFFER when the database is operational.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Katyn Massacre

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will list the records available in the Public Record Office relating to the Katyn massacre; and whether any public papers on this subject have been withheld for more than 30 years.

The Attorney-General: The main records in the Public Record Office relating to the discovery of the Katyn massacre in 1943 appear on a very large Foreign Office file of that year on the more general subject of Polish-Soviet relations. This file spans items which have the Public Record Office references FO 371/34563-34590. Eight of the 762 entered papers on this file have been identified as withheld.

Identification and listing of all other records in the Public Record Office relating to the Katyn massacre and its aftermath could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost. The staff at the Public Record Office are able to advise readers on likely sources among records there of information on this subject.

Jurors

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General what evidence was produced in the survey into the ethnicity of jurors on the distribution and percentage of black jurors being called for jury service.

The Attorney-General: The first stage of the survey into the ethnic composition of jurors has recently been completed and officials of the Lord Chancellor's Department are currently analysing the statistical data that have been collected. I will write to the hon. Member to inform him of the full results of the survey when the process of analysis and interpretation is complete.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Single Market

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding the effect of the EEC changes in 1992 on matters within his Department's responsibilities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office is taking part in discussions with our Community partners on a range of matters, mainly relating to free movement of people, which are relevant to the establishment of the internal market at the end of 1992.

In some areas measures have been agreed and therefore the effects are known. Recent examples are the rights of residence directives which were adopted last year, and the draft convention determining the state responsibility for examining asylum applications which was signed by 11 of the 12 member states last year. Documents on these measures have been deposited in Parliament.

In other areas measures are still under consideration. We shall continue to report progress following the six-monthly meetings of responsible Community Ministers.

Gipsies

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the conclusions of the review of the Public Order Act 1986 with regard to gipsies.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We hope to announce shortly the conclusions of our evaluation of section 39 of the 1986 Act.

Juvenile Remand Centres

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which juvenile remand centres are scheduled for inclusion in the privatisation programme.

Mrs. Rumbold: None.

Immigration

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of applicants for immigration from non-EC Europe, north America, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh were refused entry into the United Kingdom since January 1990 under primary purpose rules; and what factors account for the differences in the percentages.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on applicants for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom from spouses and fiancé(e)s in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh in the first three quarters of 1990 is given in the table. Corresponding information for other countries is not available centrally. The variation in refusal rates is thought to reflect differing patterns of applications and circumstances between the three countries.

Spouses and fiancé(e)s refused entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom, January to September 1990

Country	Proportion[1] of spouses and fiancé(e)s refused initially[2]	
	Solely on primary purpose grounds (Per cent.)	Partly on primary purpose grounds (Per cent.)
Bangladesh	12	4
India	18	2
Pakistan	13	21

[1] Applications refused initially as a percentage of applications decided.
[2] Some applications are subsequently granted after an appeal.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the expected time it takes for a sponsor interview for entry clearance applications to be completed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It remains our objective to carry out interviews within three months of receipt of papers in the United Kingdom.

Community Relations

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Commission for Racial Equality and with leaders of the Muslim community in the United Kingdom regarding the best ways of avoiding a disruption of community relations as a result of the Gulf war.

Mrs. Rumbold: I discussed these matters with Commissioners during a visit to the Commission for Racial Equality on 22 January. They were also discussed in the course of a meeting on the same day on other matters with the United Kingdom action committee on Islamic affairs. There are continuing and wide-ranging contacts with the Muslim community at official level.

Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the countries whose nationals require visas to enter the United Kingdom as visitors.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The list is set out in the "Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules" Cm. 1220 which took effect on 1 October 1990, a copy of which is in the Library.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Under the Home Office's present no-smoking policy, smoking is banned in conference rooms, corridors, lifts and toilets. This policy is currently under review.

Squatters

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his review of the law on squatters and to announce any changes he proposes to make with regard to privately owned domestic properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Government's review of the present law relating to the unlawful occupation of property is proceeding and particular attention is being paid to the problem of squatting in privately owned domestic properties. We shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to lay orders which will arrange the movement of the polling district of the Longfield and New Barn ward of the Dartford borough council into the Dartford parliamentary constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The boundaries of the Longfield ward, which includes the New Barn residential area, were changed by the Kent (District Boundaries) Order 1987. A consequential change to parliamentary constituency boundaries can only be made following a review by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England. This and other such anomalies throughout England will be resolved as part of the fourth general review of all constituencies which is expected to commence this year.

Braille

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria his Department uses in deciding what information should be published in *(a)* minority languages, *(b)* braille, *(c)* tape or *(d)* large print versions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* Our criteria are to target publicity material in minority languages, tape or large print according to need, within available funding. We have not produced any of this publicity material in braille.

Death Statistics

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *166*, on causes of deaths in specified cities, if he will give such figures as are available for each year from 1984.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 4 February 1991]:* The information available from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is given in the tables.

Table 1 Number of deaths registered due to Malnutrition[1]

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Greater London	9	13	9	4	4
Greater Manchester	1	0	1	1	1
Birmingham	0	1	1	1	2
Liverpool	0	0	0	1	0
England and Wales	70	63	68	43	59

[1] International classification 263.9.

Table 2 Number of deaths registered due to self-neglect[2]

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Greater London	8	1	2	1	2
Greater Manchester	4	1	1	0	2
Birmingham	3	1	0	1	2
Liverpool	0	0	1	1	0
England and Wales	42	30	19	13	23

[2] International classification 994.9/E904.0.

Table 3 Number of registered deaths with mention of Hypothermia

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Greater London	78	134	135	79	66
Greater Manchester	23	33	37	19	13
Birmingham	23	31	29	17	14
Liverpool	8	10	12	4	9
England and Wales	555	827	837	559	440

Postal Vote Forms

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects his Department to be able to supply the new postal vote forms to Dacorum borough council.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 29 January 1991]:* In order for the Representation of the People Act 1990 to take effect, it will be necessary to make some minor amendments to the Representation of the People Regulations 1986 and the European Parliamentary Elections Regulations 1986, and to make an Order in Council in respect of local elections in Northern Ireland. We shall do this as soon as possible. We intend to make the new absent voting application form RPF 8 available at the beginning of May.

Adoption

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many children from countries other than Romania were granted entry clearance for adoption purposes during 1990;

(2) how many children are currently awaiting adoption from Romania to families in the United Kingdom;

(3) how many children have been adopted into families in the United Kingdom from Romania in each of the last three years;

(4) what proportion of the children adopted into families in the United Kingdom from Romania have living birth parents.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information is that, since December 1989, 144 Romanian children have been granted entry clearance to come to the United Kingdom with a view to adoption by British couples. Forty-two applications are outstanding, 39 of which have been made since 1 December 1990. Earlier information about Romanian children and information about children from other countries granted entry clearance with a view to adoption in the United Kingdom has not been collected centrally.

No statistics are collected about the natural parents of children admitted for adoption. In all cases involving children where one or both parents are living parental consent to the proposed adoption is required.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Eggar: The Department's policy generally is to encourage staff who wish to smoke to have regard to the convenience and comfort of non-smokers. Smoking is prohibited in lifts and toilets. It is customary not to smoke in conference rooms or in shared offices unless a majority of the staff sharing the office agree to allow it. This voluntary restraint works effectively in practice. The Department is not satisfied that a change of policy is required.

Access Funds

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what deadline has been imposed for expenditure from access funds for institutions of higher and further education; and what evaluation he has made of the consequences for students of the deadline.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Any access funds grant not paid to students by the end of the academic year for which it was allocated must be returned by institutions. In the light of representations received, my right hon. and learned Friend has withdrawn an earlier condition requiring higher education institutions to return any grant held by them on 31 March in excess of 15 per cent. of their total allocation for the financial year.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the proportion of each institution's access fund which has been spent to date.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The limited information available suggests that the pattern is mixed. All institutions have been asked to provide an account of their expenditure of access funds at the end of the academic year.

Architecture Courses

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he intends to take on the designation of architecture courses for mandatory student awards, following the recent judicial review.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have now had an opportunity to consider the judgment in this case. The High Court has ruled that "a first degree course" can include a prescribed programme of study leading to a professional objective, even though a first degree itself is awarded part way through and is followed by further studies. It was not, therefore, correct to conclude that "part 2" architecture courses taken after a first degree could not, as a matter of law, be designated under the Education Act 1962 for the purpose of mandatory awards. The courts, however, made no finding as to whether, on the facts, the architecture courses are first degree or comparable courses; and it reaffirmed that the holder of my office has discretion whether or not to designate a course even though he concludes that it is a first degree or comparable course.

The judgment has clarified the scope of designation without disturbing my existing discretionary powers, and I do not propose to appeal against it. I have accordingly re-examined the "part 2" architecture courses in the light of the judgment. On the evidence before me, I have concluded that they are first degree or comparable courses, and that it would be appropriate to designate them for the time being, with effect from the coming into force of amending regulations. This decision is without prejudice to any action that I may wish to take following the separate consultations in progress about the length and structure of architecture courses.

Under the special bursary scheme established for the current academic year, architecture students on "part 2" courses should already have received bursaries of equivalent value to the mandatory awards for which they would otherwise have been eligible if designation had not been withdrawn. I am asking higher education institutions to ensure this. In addition, I intend shortly to lay before the House amendments to the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1990 to provide an award in the current academic year to any eligible student who has nevertheless not received a bursary. The bursary scheme will be wound up at the end of the current academic year, and mandatory awards will be made available to all eligible "part 2" students from the beginning of academic year 1991-92.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Uganda (HIV)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the seroprevalence of HIV in Rakai, Uganda, among *(a)* men and *(b)* women in the age groups (i) 20 to 24 years and (ii) 25 to 29 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's Government have not undertaken research of its own into this specific question, although I understand that the centre for international research of the United States Bureau of the Census published in May 1990 a review of certain studies into the seroprevalence of HIV in Uganda. The ODA and the Medical Research Council are jointly funding a five-year research project into the epidemiology of AIDS in Uganda; results are not yet available from this work.

The situation regarding HIV infection globally remains one of considerable concern. The United Kingdom is continuing to provide substantial levels of support from the overseas aid programme to the WHO global programme on AIDS—the GPA—and to a number of national AIDS control programmes developed within the framework of the GPA.

Emergencies and Reserve Funds

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the emergencies budget and the unallocated ODA reserve for the financial year 1990-91, and the percentage of each of these that has not yet been committed.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 29 January 1991]:* Humanitarian assistance provided from the aid programme takes three forms: relief for unpredictable disasters such as earthquakes and cyclones, emergency food aid, and other non-food relief. Initial provision for this assistance is made at the beginning of each financial year. For 1990-91 the provision taken in the main estimates totalled £66·7 million, including £19 million for food aid, the first call on which is emergency needs.

The aid programme is managed in a way that allows it to respond quickly to developing country needs, including humanitarian assistance. During the course of each financial year provision for humanitarian assistance is enhanced as required, drawing on the aid programme's contingency reserve and any unplanned savings arising during the year. The provision so far this financial year totals £73·5 million, of which 1·5 per cent. remains uncommitted.

The aid programme contingency reserve for 1990-91 was £40 million, including an initial earmarking of £9 million for unpredictable disasters. The contingency reserve is now fully allocated.

Developing Countries

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total amount of cash aid given bilaterally and through the European Community to developing countries.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1989 the United Kingdom gave £1,113 million in bilateral aid to developing countries. A further £674 million was given by the United Kingdom through multilateral agencies of which £305 million was channelled through the European Community.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Community Documents

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that the advice of the Treasury Solicitor on the appropriate legal base for European Community documents is published in the reports attached to these documents.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Ministers who sign explanatory memoranda take full responsibility for the contents including any comments on legal base on which they take appropriate legal advice.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions representatives of the United Kingdom Government have questioned the basing of documents on article 100A by the Commission at meetings of the Council of Ministers; and if he will list the titles of such documents and the appropriate ministerial Councils involved.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We provide explanatory memoranda to the House on all Commission proposals for Community legislation. These may include reference to the Government position on whether article 100A is the correct legal base. But exchanges during Council meetings are subject to the normal rules of confidentiality.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers the manner in which the Commission is basing draft documents on article 100A; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: When the United Kingdom has difficulties with the basing of a Commission proposal on article 100A, we will raise these during discussion of that proposal. We do not intend to raise the question at the next meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has anything to add to the evidence given by the Treasury Solicitor to the European Legislation Committee on treaty base HC178(iv) and (v) of Session 1987-88.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No. The memorandum in evidence given by the Treasury Solicitor's Department set out clearly and in detail the issues relating to choice of treaty base after the Single European Act. The criteria identified in the memorandum for use of article 100A remain valid.

Polly Peck International

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to seek to ensure that courts in northern Cyprus do not block the administrator of Polly Peck International from investigating or obtaining funds held there; and whether he will make it his policy to consider sanctions against northern Cyprus if such inquiries are disrupted.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The joint administrators of Polly Peck International plc were appointed by the British courts to manage the affairs of the company subject to the overall supervision of the court and the creditors. We continue to follow closely the progress of their investigation. Her Majesty's Government have no locus to intervene in the conduct of their work, especially with the courts in northern Cyprus.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is already the policy within this Department to ensure that every non-smoking employee has the right to work in a smoke-free area.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 29 January 1990 at column *15*.

Immigration

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the expected time it takes for *(a)* an explanatory statement to be prepared and dispatched in cases of appeal against refusal

of entry clearance and *(b)* for information concerning refused visitors' visas to be sent to Britain from overseas posts.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Overseas posts are under instruction to prepare and despatch explanatory statements for appeals against refusal of entry clearance to the independent appellate authority within one month for visit applications and three months for settlement applications.

The correspondence unit of the migration and visa department in the FCO tries to reply to inquiries from Members about refused visitors' visas within three weeks of the inquiry being registered with the unit. However, in some cases it may take longer to obtain the full case details.

Papua New Guinea

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent developments concerning Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Following talks between the two parties in Honiara, representatives of the Papua New Guinea Government and from Bougainville signed an agreement in Honiara on 23 January known as the Honiara declaration. In the declaration the two sides agreed on a regime and timetable for the restoration of services and rehabilitation of Bougainville within the existing constitutional framework of Papua New Guinea. The main features of the agreement are:

deferral of discussion of the future political status of Bougainville;

the lifting of the blockade;

restoration of all Government services on Bougainville;

creation of an interim legal authority and a task force, respectively to organise and carry out the restoration of services;

commitment by both parties to refrain from the use of weapons and arms to resolve the crisis;

provision for the establishment in Bougainville of a multinational supervisory team consisting of foreign military and policy personnel to monitor implementation of the Declaration;

agreement by the Bougainville side to disarm its forces; and the granting by the Papua New Guinea Government of an amnesty to the members of the Bougainville forces.

We welcome the Honiara agreement as a step towards the peaceful resolution of the Bougainville problem and hope it leads to the restoration of normality. The commitment of both sides will be essential if the agreement is to succeed.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Review

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his review of poll tax will consider privacy issues arising from the tax; whether he has consulted the data protection registrar about the review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The review will cover all aspects of local taxation, including any privacy issues which arise.

Community Charge

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on collection costs for the community charge per person on the register for each district in Hertfordshire.

Mr. Key: The information requested is as follows:

Community charge collection costs per head of relevant population

	Budget Estimates 1990-91 £
Broxbourne	8·90
Dacorum	7·40
East Hertfordshire	9·72
Hertsmere	17·81
North Hertfordshire	13·69
St. Albans	10·14
Stevenage	17·79
Three Rivers	17·32
Watford	14·17
Welwyn Hatfield	12·16

Merseyside Docklands

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many jobs have been created in the Merseyside docklands area since 1981; and how much each job has cost his Department through its allocation of money to the Merseyside docklands.

Mr. Portillo: A total of 4,200 permanent jobs had been created or attracted in the Merseyside development corporation area up to March 1990. It is not practicable to distinguish between expenditure leading directly to job creation and that leading to other regneration benefits.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department has made further progress in the last year towards creating a smoke-free working environment. Following consultation with staff and trade unions, agreement was reached to prohibit or restrict smoking in certain areas within office buildings, and to allow staff to designate their own individual offices as no-smoking areas.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: It is my Department's policy to ensure as far as possible that every non-smoker who wishes to do so is able to work in a smoke-free office. Under the terms of a new policy statement agreed with staff and issued last October, staff are able to decide by majority voting whether to designate their own offices non-smoking areas. It is not possible, within existing resources, to guarantee an absolute right to all non-smoking staff to work in a smoke-free area, but we aim to meet the wishes of any non-smokers who are not in a designated non-smoking office, by re-arranging accommodation where practicable.

London Brick Planning Appeal

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the results will be available of the public inquiry held in April and the beginning of May 1990 into the appeal by London Brick Property Ltd. against the refusal of outline planning permission for redevelopment at Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire, (APP/J0215/A/89/130835); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The inspector's report on the public inquiry is being considered. We expect to be in a position to issue the decision on this appeal within the next month. A statement on the issues involved would not be appropriate in advance of that decision.

Council House Sales

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of houses and flats sold under the right to buy legislation in each of the local authorities in the county of Essex since the introduction of the legislation; and if he will show the percentage of houses and flats sold.

Mr. Yeo: A table showing the available information on right-to-buy sales for each English local authority for each financial year since 1986-87 and with a cumulative total to September 1990 was recently placed in the Library. *Official Report* column *542* refers. A late return from Chelmsford revises the totals shown in the table as follows:

	Sales 1 April 1979 to 30 September 1990	*Sales as percentage of stock*
Chelmsford		
Right-to-buy sales	3,044	24·0
All sales	3,784	29·9
Of which flats	309	—

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of houses and flats sold under right to buy legislation in each of the local authorities in the county of Kent, since the introduction of the legislation; if he will show the percentage of houses and flats sold; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: A table showing the available information on right to buy sales for each English local authority for each financial year since 1986-87 and with a cumulative total to September 1990 was recently placed in the Library—*Official Report* column *542* refers. Late returns from Canterbury, Maidstone and Shepway revise the totals shown in the table as follows:

	1 April 1979 to 30 September 1990	*Sales as percentage of stock*
Canterbury		
Right-to-buy sales	2,152	24·2
All sales	2,600	29·2
Of which flats	156	—
Maidstone		
Right-to-buy sales	1,861	16·9
All sales	2,741	24·9
Of which flats	142	—
Shepway		
Right-to-buy sales	1,428	24·7
All sales	1,669	28·8
Of which flats	127	—

Of the 14 authorities in Kent three have transferred their remaining stock to a housing association—Sevenoaks (March 1989), Swale (March 1990), Tonbridge and Malling (January 1991)—while Rochester upon Medway transferred all its remaining stock to a private company in July 1990.

National Flag

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the legislative provisions under which local authorities can ban the display of the national flag; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: There are no such legislative provisions. Councillors are answerable to their electors for such decisions.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 21 January 1991 at column *87*, on refuse-derived fuel, what specific considerations he has given, to date, on any derogation to be sought under this power; what considerations and consolidations he will be giving to specific derogation once the power to derogate has been sought; and how long after the power to derogate has been sought, he expects specific derogations to be in force;

(2) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 21 January 1991 at column *87*, if the power to derogate for plant burning refuse-derived fuel will be exercised.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin).

Urban Programme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *474*, if he will *(a)* publish a table indicating the administrative costs of implementing the urban programme, for both local government and national Government, for 1989-90 and *(b)* indicate what resources were made available for the urban programme in 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 4 February 1991]:* Resources available for the urban programme in 1989-90 from central Government totalled £242 million. Local authorities contribute 25 per cent. of revenue expenditure which, together with the central Government funding of £242 million, produced a total provision of £260 million. The Department of the Environment's administrative costs were £2 million. I regret that the Government do not hold information on the administrative costs for local government.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many poll tax payers there are; how many have a rebate; and what is the average rebate.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

In 1990-91 there are around 42 million people in Great Britain liable to pay the community charge and the average community charge benefit per individual is £4·30 per week. At August 1990 the estimated number of individuals receiving community charge benefit was 8·9 million. This figure probably underestimates the current position because, at that time, local authorities still had a number of unprocessed claims; it is also slightly higher than that given in my reply on 24 January 1991 to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) at columns *307-8* because updated information from local authorities has just become available.

HEALTH

Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the perinatal mortality rate in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* each region in England and *(c)* the United Kingdom; and what information he has on the comparable rates in the countries of the EEC.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the table. In each case the latest available data year has been given.

Perinatal mortality in the United Kingdom, England and Wales, Regional Health Authorities and EC countries

Area	*Year*	*Rate*[1]
United Kingdom	1989	8·3
England and Wales	1989	8·3
England	1989	8·3
Regional Health Authorities		
Northern	1989	9·2
Yorkshire	1989	8·5
Trent	1989	8·5
East Anglian	1989	6·7
North West Thames	1989	8·3
North East Thames	1989	8·3
South East Thames	1989	8·4
South West Thames	1989	7·0
Wessex	1989	8·3
Oxford	1989	7·2
South Western	1989	6·7
West Midlands	1989	9·7
Mersey	1989	8·2
North Western	1989	9·2
Wales	1989	8·3
EC countries		
Belgium	1986	10·4
Denmark	1988	8·7
France	1988	9·2
German Federal Republic	1988	6·5
Greece	1988	12·9
Irish Republic	1987	10·4
Italy	1988	[2]12·3
Luxembourg	1988	7·1
Netherlands	1988	9·1
Portugal	1988	16·6
Spain	1985	10·9

[1] Deaths 0-6 days + Stillbirths per 1,000 total births.
[2] Provisional.

Maternal Mortality

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the most recent maternal mortality rate in the United Kingdom; and what information he has on the comparable rates in *(a)* the countries of the EEC and *(b)* the World Health Organisation European region.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is shown in the table. In each case the latest available data year have been given. No data are readily available for the WHO European region as a whole; selected countries, other than those within the EC, are shown.

Maternal mortality in the United Kingdom, EC countries and selected countries from the WHO European Region

Area	*Year*	*Rate*[1]
United Kingdom	1989	7·7
Other EEC countries		
Belgium	1986	3·4
Denmark	1988	3·4
France	1988	9·3
German Federal Republic	1988	8·9
Greece	1987	4·7
Irish Republic	1987	3·4
Italy	1986	5·5
Luxembourg	1988	0·0
Netherlands	1988	9·6
Portugal	1988	6·6
Spain	1985	4·4
Others in WHO European Region		
Austria	1988	5·7
Bulgaria	1987	19·7
Czechoslovakia	1988	13·0
Finland	1987	5·0
German Democratic Republic	1988	14·8
Hungary	1988	16·9
Iceland	1988	0·0
Israel	1987	3·0
Malta	1988	0·0
Norway	1987	5·6
Poland	1988	11·6
Rumania	1984	148·8
Sweden	1987	4·8
Switzerland	1988	10·0
Yugoslavia	1987	10·6

[1] Deaths attributed to complications of pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium per 100,000 live births.
Data, except for United Kingdom, from WHO European Regional Office 'Indicator Presentation System'.

Infant Mortality

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the most recent infant mortality rate in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* each region in England and *(c)* the United Kingdom; and what information he has on the comparable rates in (i) the countries of the EEC and (ii) the World Health Organisation European region.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is shown in the table. In each case the latest available data year has been given. No data are readily available for the World Health Organisation European region as a whole; selected countries, other than those within the EC, are shown.

Infant mortality in the United Kingdom, England and Wales, Regional Health Authorities, EC countries and selected countries from the World Health Organisation European Region.

Area	*Year*	*Rate*[1]
United Kingdom	1989	8·4
England and Wales	1989	8·4
England	1989	8·4

Area	Year	Rate[1]
Regional Health Authorities		
Northern	1989	8·4
Yorkshire	1989	9·1
Trent	1989	8·1
East Anglian	1989	6·4
North West Thames	1989	8·2
North East Thames	1989	8·4
South East Thames	1989	8·4
South West Thames	1989	7·7
Wessex	1989	8·8
Oxford	1989	7·9
South Western	1989	7·3
West Midlands	1989	9·9
Mersey	1989	7·6
North Western	1989	9·1
Wales	1989	8·0
Other EC countries		
Belgium	1988	[2]9·1
Denmark	1988	7·6
France	1988	7·8
German Federal Republic	1988	7·5
Greece	1988	11·0
Irish Republic	1988	[2]9·2
Italy	1988	[2]9·5
Luxembourg	1988	8·7
Netherlands	1988	6·8
Portugal	1988	13·1
Spain	1988	[2]8·1
Others in World Health Organisation European Region		
Austria	1988	8·1
Bulgaria	1987	14·7
Czechoslovakia	1988	[2]11·9
Finland	1987	6·1
German Democratic Republic	1988	8·1
Hungary	1988	15·8
Iceland	1988	6·2
Israel	1987	11·1
Malta	1988	9·2
Norway	1987	8·4
Poland	1988	16·2
Rumania	1984	23·4
Sweden	1987	6·1
Switzerland	1988	6·8
Yugoslavia	1987	25·1

[1]Deaths under 1 year per 1,000 live births.
[2]Provisional.

Braille

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was spent by his Department on producing information in *(a)* braille, *(b)* tape and *(c)* large print for each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) if he will list those publications produced by his Department over the last five years which were also produced in *(a)* braille, *(b)* tape and *(c)* large print, and the cost of each publication.

Mr. Dorrell: Precise information in the form and for the period requested is not available. The table lists a number of recent documents which have been produced in braille, tape or large print, together with the approximate cost, where known.

Document	Type	Approx. £ cost
1988-89		
"A Wider Vision	Braille	unknown
"Keep Warm Keep Well"	Audio tape	4,660
1989-90		
"Sign Posts"	Braille	1,072
"Sign Posts"	Audio tape	110
"Sign Posts"	Large print	unknown
"Coordinating Services for Visually Handicapped People"	Braille	309
"Coordinating Services for Visually Handicapped People"	Audio tape	28
"Keep Warm Keep Well"	Audio tape	6,452
1990-91		
"Keep Warm Keep Well"	Audio tape	7,587
"NHS Reforms and You"	Audio tape	25,300
"NHS Reforms and You"	Braille/Moon	4,800

Overseas Adoptions

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consideration he has given to expediting the work of local council social services departments when considering the adoption of children from overseas; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his policy on the acceptability for domestic adoption procedures by social services departments of home study reports prepared for overseas authorities by independent reputable social workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Detailed guidance on intercountry adoption issued to directors of social services last autumn includes guidance on the assessment of prospective adopters by local authorities and on home study reports which have been commissioned privately. Reports by social workers are acceptable only if prepared by or on behalf of the prospective adopters' social services department. Copies of CI(90)17 to directors of social services in England, DSW 3/90 for Scotland and equivalent guidance for Wales are available in the Library.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by location, his Department's 12 pilot projects aimed at reducing waiting times for hearing aid services; what is the cost of each project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The table lists the projects by location and shows the funding allocated to each project in 1990-91, based on the project manager's estimate of expenditure in each case. We shall shortly be inviting project managers to let us have their estimate of project costs for 1991-92. In addition to funding individual projects, the Department is funding the Hester Adrian research centre at the university of Manchester to carry out an evaluation of all 12 projects. The total estimated cost of the evaluation is £80,000.

Project/location	Funding £
Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading	4,000
Manor Hospital, Walsall	26,000
Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield	10,000
Royal United Hospital, Bath	8,000
Leeds General Infirmary, Leeds	21,000
Leicester Royal Infirmary, Leicester	28,000
Freeman Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne	9,000
Mayday University Hospital, Thornton Heath	12,000
Walton Hospital, Liverpool	15,000
Royal East Sussex Hospital, Hastings	12,000
Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Exeter	30,000
Queen Victoria Hospital, Morecambe	8,000

Drug Prices

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on examples of competitive pricing for the sale of drugs from major pharmaceutical suppliers for the main categories of prescribed drugs within the national health service, and those purchased in France and Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The United Kingdom system controls profits of pharmaceutical manufacturers from their sales to the national health service not directly the prices of individual products. Accordingly we do not maintain detailed records of prices in other countries.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: It is the Department's policy to move as quickly as possible, after local discussions and agreement, to provide a smoke-free environment for those of its employees who wish it. Implementation of this policy has been piloted in selected buildings and a programme leading to full introduction of a smoke-free working environment now forms part of the Department's accommodation strategy. It will not be possible to guarantee every non-smoking employee a smoke-free area until the Department's current accommodation strategy is implemented fully by summer 1993.

New Treatments

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the types of operation and forms of treatment that are currently available on the National Health Service but were not so available before 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: As a result of medical advances, the skill and flexibility of national health service staff and the Government's continued commitment and support, a wide range of new operations and treatments have become available through the National Health Service since 1979. Some examples of these are:

Bone implanted hearing aids
Types of facial prostheses using titanium screws
Minimally invasive therapy
Some forms of laser treatment
Cochlear implants
Intravenous thrombolytic therapy
Lithotripsy
Heart, heart/lung, lung, liver transplants
Stereotactic radiosurgery
Drug treatment of peptic ulcer
Drug treatment for anaemia in renal patients
Progress in paediatric heart surgery
Progress in treatment of certain children's cancers
Progress in treatment of vulnerable or sick new born and older children

Trust Members

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of the Freeman hospital trust, and the Newcastle mental health unit trust in each case indicating the emoluments they are able to receive and the date from which any such emoluments may be paid.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Trust boards are made up of equal numbers of executive and non-executive directors plus a chairman. Each non-executive director will receive a remuneration of £5,000 per annum payable from the date of establishment. Remuneration for executive directors will be determined by the Trust Management Board and will be payable from the date of appointment. The chairman of the Freeman group of hospitals and Newcastle mental health national health service trusts will both receive a remuneration of £15,503 from the date of establishment increasing to £15,659 per annum from 1 January 1991.

Following is a list of the chairmen and non-executive membership for the Freeman group of hospitals and Newcastle mental health national health service trusts;

The Freeman Group of Hospitals National Health Service Trust

Mr. F. Hoult

Dr. R. Freeman
Mrs. M. Border
Mr. R. Middleton
Mr. J. Teasdale Ward
Miss H. M. Goodworth

Newcastle Mental Health National Health Service Trust

Reverend B. Vernon

Mrs. I Cheyne
Mr. D. K. Wilson
Professor I. Ferrier
Mr. B. Roycroft
Mr. N. Price

Agency Nurses

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the amount of spending in each regional health authority on agency nurses in 1989-90.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information derived from the annual accounts of regional and district health authorities in England together with those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals is shown in the table.

Revenue expenditure on non-national health service (agency, etc.) nursing staff—1989-90

Region	*£'000 (cash)*
Northern	52
Yorkshire	2,527
Trent	1,872
East Anglian	3,073
North West Thames	27,681
North East Thames	32,911
South East Thames	20,336
South West Thames	17,255
Wessex	4,595
Oxford	2,624
South Western	2,820
West Midlands	6,668
Mersey	1,541
North Western	1,678
Regions total	125,633
Special health authorities	9,344
England	134,977

WALES

Dams

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the capacity of each dam in Wales which falls within the scope of the Reservoirs Act 1975; and if he will give, in each case, the name of the undertaker.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally. However, most of it is available on public registers maintained by the enforcement authorities and available for inspection at their principal offices during normal working hours.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dams in each county in Wales fall within the scope of the Reservoirs Act 1975.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information, which is drawn from the latest bi-annual reports submitted to the Secretary of State by enforcement authorities—county councils—in April 1989, is as follows:

Reservoirs falling within the scope of the Reservoirs Act 1975

County	*Number*
Clwyd	28
Gwynedd	51
Powys	39
Dyfed	52
West Glamorgan	13
Mid Glamorgan	19
South Glamorgan	5
Gwent	22
Total	229

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what remedial works have been carried out to dams in Wales under the terms of the Reservoirs Act 1975; and what was the expenditure involved in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information in not held centrally.

Local Authority Land

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if his proposals outlined in his consultation paper on the use of vacant local authority land are intended to dispose of public assets at below market values;

(2) what compensation procedures will be followed by vending authorities when a potential purchaser will not pay full market value for unused local authority land under his proposals in the consultation paper on the use of vacant local authority land;

(3) what level of human resources is to be committed to the operation of the machinery and regulations necessary to fulfil the aims of his consultation paper on the use of vacant local authority land, in particular in respect of clawback for any future enhancement of values;

(4) if he will publish the criteria he intends to use to identify unused and under-used public sector land in his proposals in the consultation paper on use of local authority vacant land for the purpose of bringing it back into use;

(5) if it is his intention to privatise local authority unused land.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In the light of the responses received to our consultation paper my right hon. Friend will be considering with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures might be appropriate to encourage the bringing into use of vacant public sector land.

Reservoirs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many prosecutions have been made under the provisions of the Reservoirs Act 1975; what were the alleged offences; and in how many cases such prosecutions were successful.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No prosecutions under the provisions of the Reservoirs Act 1975, have been reported by the enforcement authorities. The reports due on 1 April this year will disclose whether any prosecutions have taken place since 1989.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps have been taken to implement the provisions of the Reservoirs Act 1975 in Wales; and if he proposes to introduce any additional measures.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The provisions of the Reservoirs Act 1975 were implemented in England, Wales and Scotland in stages through subordinate legislation between 8 November 19[illegible] and 1 April 1986. No additional measures are pr[illegible]osed.

Factories, Fishguard

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans the Welsh Development Agency has to build factories at Scleddau, near Fishguard during the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: No plans at the present time.

A-Levels

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in *(a)* Dyfed and *(b)* Wales took their A-level examinations through the medium of Welsh during 1990; and what were the corresponding figures for the last five years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of entries for Welsh Joint Education Committee A-level subjects examined through the medium of Welsh is shown in the table. Information on the number of children sitting examinations is not available, also information for Dyfed is only available from 1989 onwards.

	Wales[1]	*Dyfed*[1]
1985	519	—
1986	623	—
1987	583	—
1988	691	—
1989	747	152
1990	903	169

[1] Summer examinations.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: The Department has operated a no-smoking policy since 1989, with the aim of providing a smoke-free environment for the health and comfort of all staff. Smoking is restricted to designated areas and is prohibited in open-plan and other communal work areas. The policy is working well.

Women Employees

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of employees in Wales are women; what the corresponding figures were for each year from 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is given in the table. The figures are estimates from the Employment Department's quarterly series for June each year.

Female employees in employment as a percentage of total[1]

Year	*Per cent.*
1980	40·5
1981	41·4
1982	41·8
1983	42·5
1984	43·2
1985	43·7
1986	44·3
1987	45·1
1988	46·0
1989	47·2
1990	47·8

[1]Full-time and part-time.

Wool Prices

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to extend the guaranteed price system for wool for a further period of five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government's intention remains, as announced in October 1988, to end the wool guarantee as soon as possible.

Educational Institutions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the education committees of the relevant Welsh counties regarding the tapering provisions of top-up funding from local education authority budgets to the institutions listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 30 January 1991 at columns *514-15*.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Top-up funding has been discussed by the Wales Advisory Body, which I chair and which includes members from each of the local education authorities. The WAB is the body responsible for advising my right hon. Friend on matters concerning local authority higher education.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the principals and directors of the institutions listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 30 January 1991 at columns *514-15*, regarding future staffing levels and redundancy policies for academic and non-academic staff.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The staffing of these institutions is a matter for the institutions themselves and their maintaining LEAs.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the principals and directors of the institutions listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 30 January 1991 at columns *514-15*, regarding the future of further education courses currently provided at those institutions.

Sir Wyn Roberts: After 1 April 1992 the provision of further education courses will remain the responsibility of LEAs. They will be able to contract with the independent higher education institutions for the provision of further education courses in those institutions.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the principals and directors of the institutions listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 30 January 1991 at columns *514-15*, regarding the restoration of vocational higher education courses closed in the present and last financial year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Since July 1990 the approval of my right hon. Friend for the provision of higher education courses, other than courses of initial teacher training, has not been required.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* academic and *(b)* non-academic staff are employed at the institutions listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 30 January 1991 at columns *514-15;* and if he will make a statement on future staffing levels at the institutions after 1 April 1992.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In 1988-89 the number of full-time equivalent teaching staff at each of the five institutions which are to be incorporated was as follows:

	Number
Polytechnic of Wales	372·5
Cardiff Institute of Higher Education	404·3
Gwent College of Higher Education	233·6
Normal College, Bangor	42·2
West Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education	223·1

Details of non-teaching are not held centrally.

Future staffing levels will be entirely the responsibility of the governing bodies of the incorporated institutions.

Community Charge

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will give the reasons behind the decision to provide a transitional relief level of £5 to poll tax payers in Butetown, Cardiff, for 1991-92 and all the figures involved in the calculation;

(2) if he will give the reasons behind the decision to provide a transitional relief level of £18 to poll tax payers in Llanthavadr ym Mochnant, Montgomeryshire, for 1991-92 and all the figures involved in the calculation;

(3) if he will give the reasons behind the decision to provide a transitional relief level of £23 to poll tax payers in Llanrumney, Cardiff, for 1991-92 and all the figures involved in the calculation;

(4) if he will give the reasons behind the decision to provide a transitional relief level of £3 to poll tax payers in Colwyn bay for 1991-92 and all the figures involved in the calculation;

(5) if he will give the reasons behind the decision to provide a transitional relief level of £107 to poll tax payers in Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant, Glyndwr, for 1991-92 and all the figures involved in the calculation;

(6) if he will give the reasons behind the decision to provide a transitional relief level of £79 to poll tax payers in Llansantffraid Glyn Cevriog, for 1991-92 and all the figures involved in the calculation.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to him on 4 February. The table gives the specific information requested.

Relief 1991-92

Local authority and community council	*Domestic rateable value* £	*[1] Relevant population* number	*Domestic poundage* poundage	*Notional average domestic rates per adult* £	*1990-91 community charge* £	*Difference between community charge and rates* £	*Amount above £37 threshold* £
Cardiff							
Butetown	222,891	2,342	222·11	211	253	42	5
Llanrumney	811,731	9,330	222·11	193	253	60	23
Colwyn							
Colwyn Bay	597,024	7,604	281·60	221	261	40	3
Glyndwr							
Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant	26,230	528	276·10	137	281	144	107
Llansantffraid Glyn Ceiriog	49,626	828	276·10	165	281	116	79
Montgomeryshire							
Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant	14,244	285	229·85	115	170	55	18

[1] As specified in Appendix 2 of the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report.

Welsh College of Music and Drama

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet the chairman of South Glamorgan education committee to discuss the future of the Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As indicated in my right hon. Friend's reply of 30 January officials are discussing the future status of the Welsh College of Music and Drama with South Glamorgan county council.

House Building

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses were *(a)* started and *(b)* completed in 1990 for each of the local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is given in the following table.

Local Authority starts and completions 1990[1]

Welsh districts	*Starts*	*Completions*
Aberconwy	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	67	52
Arfon	0	0
Blaenau Gwent[2]	0	0
Brecknock	0	19
Cardiff	47	0
Carmarthen	0	0
Ceredigion	0	6
Colwyn	0	0
Cynon Valley	0	0
Delyn	0	0
Dinefwr	0	0
Dwyfor	8	0
Glyndwr	0	0
Islwyn	0	9
Llanelli	106	28
Liw Valley	0	69
Meirionnydd	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0
Monmouth[2]	0	68
Montgomeryshire	24	8
Neath	0	0
Newport	0	64
Ogwr	0	6
Port Talbot	0	0
Preseli Pembrokeshire	18	6
Radnorshire	0	22
Rhondda	0	0
Rhuddlan	8	31
Rhymney Valley	0	6
South Pembrokeshire	0	0
Swansea	0	75
Taff-Ely	0	0
Torfaen	0	0
Vale of Glamorgan	29	41
Wrexham Maelor	31	41
Ynys Mon	0	0
Wales total	338	551

[1] Provisional.
[2] The information for Blaenau Gwent and Monmouth is for the period January to November 1990.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses were *(a)* started and *(b)* completed by each of the housing associations in Wales in 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Data for 1990 are not yet available. Housing for Wales plan to provide 3,000 additional units during the financial year 1990-91.

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses were sold by each of the local authorities in Wales for the last four years estimating the amount realised by each local authority on the sales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is given in the table:

Sales of local authority dwellings and associated amounts realised 1986-1989

Local authority	Sales 1986-89 Number	Amount realised (£000's)
Aberconwy	624	6,463
Alyn and Deeside	709	7,023
Arfon	497	5,280
Blaenau Gwent	1,118	10,544
Brecknock	509	5,862
Cardiff	3,460	42,246
Carmarthen	381	4,513
Ceredigion	534	6,655
Colwyn	384	3,899
Cynon Valley	526	4,312
Delyn	456	4,489
Dinefwr	364	3,555
Dwyfor	94	1,087
Glyndŵr	435	4,477
Islwyn	1,154	11,866
Llanelli	1,052	8,290
Lliw Valley	634	5,496
Meirionnydd	287	2,915
Merthyr Tydfil	1,021	8,995
Monmouth	818	11,958
Montgomeryshire	410	5,188
Neath	920	8,516
Newport	1,633	21,052
Ogwr	1,761	18,123
Port Talbot	1,405	13,218
Preseli Pembrokeshire	859	9,354
Radnorshire	161	2,134
Rhondda	342	2,473
Rhuddlan	369	3,788
Rhymney Valley	1,237	11,749
South Pembrokeshire	358	4,560
Swansea	2,189	21,841
Taff-Ely	1,702	15,964
Torfaen	1,518	18,072
Vale of Glamorgan	1,209	16,179
Wrexham Maelor	1,572	15,646
Ynys Môn	702	8,407

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will share my pleasure that so many tenants have been able to buy their houses.

Health Service

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost to date of refining and extending an analysis database to test the implications of alternative patterns of provision and to identify performance targets for the NHS in Wales as part of the Welsh Office's corporate management programme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: About £5,600 a year, at 1990-91 prices.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the budget of the Mid-Glamorgan family practitioner committee in 1988, 1989 and 1990; and what is the budget of the Mid-Glamorgan family health services authority for 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The administration revenue net allocations to Mid-Glamorgan family practitioner committee—from 17 September 1990, Mid-Glamorgan family health services Authority—for the relevant financial years are as follows:

	£
1988-89	[1]599,652
1989-90	[1]709,502
1990-91	[2]1,031,730

[1] Final cash limit.
[2] Provisional cash limit.

The 1991-92 administration revenue allocations for FHSAs in Wales will be notified shortly.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost, by authority, during 1990-91, of setting up teams within district health authorities in Wales whose function is to perform the purchaser role described in section 3.23 of the Welsh Office publication, "NHS Wales: Agenda for Action, 1991-93."

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The internal management and organisation of an authority's purchase role is for the individual districts to determine. In recognition of the increased responsibilities for the introduction of the contractual framework, and consideration of NHS trusts, DHAs have received additional resources totalling £2·4 million and £2·7 million in 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively and which covers both the purchase and provider functions.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost of the implementation of the measures contained in the Welsh Office national health service directorate proposals in "NHS Wales: Agenda for Action, 1991-93."

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The main purpose of the agenda for action is to help the NHS refocus its activities and existing resources to achieve a better return in terms of both the health of the people of Wales and the services available to them.

As such, the actions identified are central to the NHS management effort, with related costs being woven into and covered principally by the mainstream budgets of the various organisations involved.

TRANSPORT

New Road, Cheshire

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the route of the toll road planned to pass through Cheshire and its estimated time of construction; what environmental studies have been carried out before the route was finalised; and what public consultations he has had in Cheshire.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has received four responses from the private sector to its invitation for broad outline proposals for additional longer term road capacity between Birmingham and Manchester. These proposals are still under evaluation, and no decision has been taken on a preferred scheme, or its route and timing. As and when a favoured proposal is selected, consultation will take place with all interested parties in the normal way. Any privately-financed road scheme must comply with the same environmental standards as a public scheme.

Air Transport (VAT)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of the effect of introducing value added tax on air transport within Europe.

Mr. McLoughlin: Until the European Commission comes forward with detailed proposals for the post-1992 VAT regime, I can make no such assessment.

A1(M)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of *(a)* accidents, *(b)* fatalities and *(c)* injuries on the A1(M) between Scotch corner and Newcastle for each year since 1980, and the number of commercial and private vehicles involved.

Mr. Chope: The information for the A1(M), in the detail requested, is available from the Durham county boundary, north of Scotch corner, to its northern end near Newcastle upon Tyne, as follows:

Year	*Injury accidents*	*Fatalities*	*Injuries*	*Commercial vehicles*	*Private vehicles*
1980	45	1	79	19	62
1981	33	1	49	5	43
1982	37	3	56	17	42
1983	28	1	55	24	30
1984	36	2	58	13	35
1985	43	4	107	24	40
1986	42	3	73	23	50
1987	53	5	80	23	71
1988	40	3	72	20	52
1989	81	1	141	30	132
[1]1990	54	4	96	[2]	[2]

[1] Up to 31 October 1990.
[2] Not yet known.

Car Accidents

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many primary school children have been knocked down by cars in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Chope: In 1989 there were 10,749 pedestrians aged five to 11 who sustained injury after being struck by cars. Of these, 107 were killed, 2,656 were seriously injured and 7,986 were slightly injured.

A69

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of *(a)* accidents, *(b)* fatalities and *(c)* injuries on the A69 for each year since 1980.

Mr. Chope: The number of personal injury accidents for the A69 from its junction with the M6 to Newcastle upon Tyne are as follows:

Year	*Accidents (a)*	*Fatalities (b)*	*Injuries (c)*
1980	87	5	142
1981	97	8	166
1982	90	11	178
1983	78	4	133
1984	83	3	123
1985	86	6	181
1986	101	5	163
1987	91	3	194
1988	106	10	172
1989	99	8	156
[1]1990	114	9	170

[1] January to November only.

Fareham-Badenham Line

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail on the future of the railway line between Fareham and RNAD Badenham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: None. This line is used only by freight traffic, and its future is a matter for British Rail.

M27

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he has any plans to improve junction 10 of the M27 with the A32 at Fareham;

(2) whether he has any plans for improvements to junction 11 of the M27 at Fareham, including traffic signals;

(3) whether he has any plans to improve junction 9 of the M27 at Segensworth.

Mr. Chope: Yes. We intend to provide peak period traffic signals at both junctions 9 and 11 of the M27. Tenders for these have been invited with a view to completing installation of the signals this summer.

A report of a study, announced in the White Paper "Roads for Prosperity", into the possible need for further improvements to the M27, the M271 link and their junctions is being considered at present.

A32

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he recognises the Gosport/Fareham section of the A32 road as a road of more than local significance for the purpose of transport supplementary grant.

Mr. Chope: Not at the moment. However, it is open to the local highway authority to make a case by explaining the extent to which considers its proposals relate to the Secretary of State's objectives in respect of grant support for local roads, as described in the Department's annual circular about bids for transport supplementary grant.

School Buses

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statistics he has on the number of accidents involving school buses and the number of persons injured.

Mr. Chope: The Department collects information only on accidents which involve personal injury. No information is available on the use to which vehicles are put at the time of the accident, but information is available on bus or minibus accidents involving at least one school pupil who was injured whilst travelling as a passenger.

Bus or minibus accidents involving at least one school pupil injured while travelling as a passenger: GB 1985-1989

Year	Number of accidents	School pupil passengers:	
		Killed	Injured
1989	712	6	1,416
1988	663	8	1,214
1987	658	4	1,254
1986	734	1	1,168
1985	776	4	1,379

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the main recommendations and conclusions of the first report of the Transport Committee on aircraft cabin safety.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall be giving the Committee the Government's full response in due course.

Buses

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take concerning bus priority measures in response to the Bus and Coach Council's document "Buses Mean Business".

Mr. Freeman: I welcome the Bus and Coach Council's initiative "Buses Mean Business". A working group under my chairmanship will be established immediately to consider ways in which buses and coaches can contribute towards easing congestion and improving the environment. We shall shortly be inviting representatives from the Bus and Coach Council and from local authority associations to participate in this group.

We shall also invite local authorities to consider what bus priority measures might be appropriate in their areas and, if suitable schemes are put forward, we would hope to allocate appropriate resources for that purpose in 1992-93. Examples of such schemes could include green routes, which comprise a series of bus priority features such as dedicated bus lanes and priority at junctions for buses; park and ride schemes; and schemes to improve passenger facilities and the provision of information technology. The working group will also look at the potential for both the trolleybus and the guided bus.

We are also considering how best to promote environmentally friendly buses. As a first step we are undertaking a preliminary survey of the relative merits and long term potential of alternative fuels.

Rail Services

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent meetings he has had with the chairman of British Rail to discuss east coast main line services to London and to Europe.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the chairman of the British Railways Board on 17 January to discuss various railway matters, including the east coast main line and channel tunnel services.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether agreement has yet been reached on the provision of a weighbridge at Coquelles in France, in connection with weight controls on lorries arriving in the United Kingdom via the channel tunnel.

Mr. Chope: Eurotunnel propose to install a weighbridge in the freight terminal at Coquelles. Discussions are continuing with Eurotunnel about United Kingdom enforcement staff using the weighing facility for checking lorry weights prior to vehicles being loaded on to the rail cars and travelling to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of British Rail's preferred geographical route for the channel tunnel high speed rail link, indicating on it where the route deviates from his preferred route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is still studying the options for a route for the rail link, and do not expect to reach their conclusions until the spring. My right hon. and learned Friend has not expressed any preference as to route. But he has issued initial safeguarding directions for the section between Cheriton and Upper Halling in Kent of the route announced by BR in 1989.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department's policy is to create a non-smoking environment with facilities for those who wish to smoke. Arrangements may be made for smokers and non-smokers to occupy separate offices where other management considerations permit and, where all occupants of an office agree, staff may display "no-smoking" signs in that office. Local management may also agree further measures to apply locally, on a voluntary basis.

Further restrictions on smoking in lifts, corridors, conference rooms and other common areas were introduced in September 1990.

Dartford Bridge

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the Dartford bridge will be open for motor traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: No date has been fixed for the opening of the new bridge between Dartford and Thurrock. Completion is on target for late summer.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the name of the new bridge currently being constructed over the River Thames at Dartford.

Mr. Chope: No decision has been taken on a name for this new bridge.

Thames River Services

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial support he gives to riverbus operations on the Thames.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* The Government have made a grant of £500,000 to the consortium responsible for the riverbus service.

North Devon Link Road

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the safety record of the north Devon link road and take any steps necessary to realign, redesign and light junctions with local roads.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* As indicated during my right hon. and learned Friend's meeting with the hon. Member on 4 February, the safety of the north Devon link road and its junctions is kept under continuing review and, as part of this process, lighting is to be installed at Landkey junction near Barnstaple.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* working families with children and *(b)* childless people in work had incomes below the tax threshold at the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Maude: There are an estimated 0·5 million working families with children and 1 million childless people in work not liable to income tax in 1990-91. These estimates are based on information projected from the 1988 and 1989 family expenditure surveys and are, therefore, provisional.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *461*, on the reserves, if he will indicate how exchange rate mechanism intervention arrangements and swaps affect the published total inflows and outflows in the months since Britain joined the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Maples: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to disclose details of official intervention in the foreign exchange markets: the information is market sensitive, and disclosure of details would risk undermining the effectiveness of intervention.

The European monetary co-operation Fund—EMCF—swap involves the issue of ECUs to European monetary system central banks in exchange for deposits by them of 20 per cent. of their gold and dollar reserves. Any valuation change arising from the quarterly rollover of the United Kingdom's EMCF swap is included in the published total of reserves.

Bank of England

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the present members of the court of the Bank of England and the dates of their appointment.

Mr. Maples: The current members of the court of the Bank of England are as follows:—

	Date of first appointment	*Expiry date of current appointment*
The Rt. Hon. Robin Leigh-Pemberton, Governor	1 July 1983	30 June 1993
Edward Alan John George, Esq.	1 March 1990	28 February 1995
Sir George Adrian Hayhurst Cadbury	1 March 1970	28 February 1994
Sir Hector Laing	1 March 1973	28 February 1991
Sir David Gerald Scholey, CBE	1 March 1981	28 February 1994
Sir David Alan Walker	1 March 1982	28 February 1993
The Hon. Sir John Francis Harcourt Baring, KCVO	1 March 1983	28 February 1991
Dr. Donald Valentine Atterton, CBE	1 March 1984	29 February 1992
Sir Frederick Brian Corby	1 March 1985	28 February 1993
Lord Haslam of Bolton	1 March 1985	28 February 1993
Gavin Harry Laird, Esq. CBE	1 March 1986	28 February 1994
Sir Martin Wakefield Jacomb	19 May 1986	28 February 1991
Sir Colin Ross Corness	1 March 1987	28 February 1991
Brian Quinn, Esq.	1 April 1988	29 February 1992
John Stanton Flemming, Esq.	1 October 1988	29 February 1992
Andrew Duncan Crockett, Esq	1 March 1989	28 February 1993
Anthony Laurie Coleby, Esq.	1 March 1990	28 February 1994
Professor Mervyn Allister King	1 March 1990	29 February 1992

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Codes of practice on smoking have recently been introduced in the Treasury's main Parliament street building and in the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency at all locations. The codes provide for no smoking in most communal areas, with decisions about whether or not there should be smoking in offices to be taken by the occupants. A no-smoking policy is in operation throughout the computer suite of the Chessington computer centre. Elsewhere in the centre a policy similar to that in the rest of the department is in force.

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate, on the same basis as the ready reckoner published in the autumn statement, the effect on a one-earner, two-child family of spending in 1991-92 the sum on *(a)* a 1p cut in the basic rate of income tax, *(b)* raising income tax thresholds above their indexed levels, *(c)* raising child benefit assuming; (i) no change in income support and family credit rates and (ii) corresponding changes in income support and family credit rates.

Mr. Maude *[pursuant to his reply, 28 January 1991, c. 390]:* I regret that two figures at *(c)* (i) in the table were erroneous; rather than £6·30 and £12·60 these should have been £4·30 and £8·60 respectively.

Oil Prices

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the impact on revenues of a $1 increase on the price of a barrel of oil in *(a)* a full year and *(b)* a month.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* The extra North sea tax accruals—royalty, petroleum revenue tax and corporation tax—from a sustained increase in the crude oil price of 1 dollar per barrel would yield about £0·2 billion in a full year assuming no change in the exchange rate or in company activity in the North sea. Additional tax receipts in 1990-91 arising from an increase of 1 dollar per barrel in the 1990 calendar year would be about £0·15 billion. The monthly average is £12·5 million but the effect in individual months is very variable depending upon due dates for corporate tax and the six-monthly structure of payments of PRT and royalties.

Paris Club Debt

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present total stock of Paris Club debt; and how much of it is debt owed to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* The Paris club mainly restructures debts outstanding to the export credit agencies of OECD countries. At end 1987 OECD export credit agencies total outstanding stock of debt was about $375 billion. Of this total, about $48 billion was debt outstanding to the United Kingdom.

THE ARTS

National Museums

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts when he expects the survey by Ove Arup into the future of the national museums to be completed.

Mr. Renton: I expect that the current review by Arup Research and Development of the building renovation needs of the national museums and galleries which I sponsor will be completed by summer 1991.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what is the estimated cost of the survey by Ove Arup into the future of the national museums.

Mr. Renton: The total cost of the review of the renovation needs of the national museums and galleries which I sponsor is estimated at £120,000 including the consultancy fees to be paid to Arup Research and Development.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to publish the survey by Ove Arup into the future of the national museums.

Mr. Renton: I shall be considering in due course what would be the most appropriate action to take in respect of the advice offered to me by Arup Research and Development when it reports to me on the building renovation needs of the national museums and galleries which I sponsor.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what is the percentage representation of members of ethnic minorities at each grade level in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is as follows. these are provisional figures as at 1 April 1990 and are based on the 80 per cent. of staff who have responded to the ethnic origin survey. The programme for action on race, which was introduced in May 1990, will build on existing measures to ensure equality of opportunity for all staff.

Respondents by ethnic origin and by grade level as a percentage of all respondents (1 April 1990)

Grade level	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other ethnic*	*Total ethnic*	*Total respondents*
1	100·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	100·0
2	100·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	100·0
3	100·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	100·0
4	99·4	0·0	0·3	0·3	0·6	100·0
5	98·2	0·2	1·2	0·4	1·8	100·0
6	97·6	0·2	1·9	0·3	2·4	100·0
7	98·5	0·2	0·9	0·3	1·5	100·0
SEO	98·6	0·2	0·9	0·3	1·4	100·0
HEO	98·2	0·4	1·1	0·3	1·8	100·0
EO	96·9	0·9	1·9	0·4	3·1	100·0
AO	93·9	2·3	3·4	0·4	6·1	100·0
AA	93·2	3·1	3·4	0·3	6·8	100·0
Others	98·5	0·9	0·6	0·0	1·5	100·0
Total	95·5	1·7	2·5	0·4	4·5	100·0

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many statutory instruments were placed before the House in the 1989-90 Session; and how many were the subject of the affirmative procedure and of the negative procedure.

Mr. MacGregor: In Session 1989-90, a total of 164 instruments requiring affirmative approval, 916 instruments subject to annulment, 49 statutory rules of Northern Ireland—subject to negative procedure—and eight special procedure orders were considered by the Joint or Select Committee on Statutory Instruments. These figures do not include Orders in Council and draft Orders in Council made or proposed to be made under paragraph 1 of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974. Subject to the decision of the House, the Sessional Return relating to delegated legislation will include figures for the total number of statutory instruments laid before the House during this and in future Sessions.

Select Committee on Trade and Industry

Mr. Amos: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the airline used and the desination of each of the overseas visits undertaken by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry for the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Since January 1990 the Committee has undertaken three visits overseas. The arrangements made in respect of each visit were as follows. The first, in February 1990, was to Brussels using Air Europe and British Airways, except for one Member who travelled between Newcastle and Brussels by Sabena. The second, in May 1990, was to Oslo, Helsinki, Stockholm and Reykjavik; the flights to Oslo and from Stockholm were by British Airways; between Oslo, Helsinki, and Stockholm by Finnair; between Stockholm, Reykjavik and Glasgow by Icelandair; between Glasgow and London by British Airways. The third in June 1990 was to Zurich, Berne and Vienna; the flights to Zurich and from Vienna were by British Airways; and by Swissair between Zurich and Vienna.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will state in table form which of the powers of the Privy Council listed in his reply of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *369 (a)* can and *(b)* cannot be scrutinised by the House.

Mr. John MacGregor: The only category of Privy Council functions subject to parliamentary scrutiny, is those powers conferred on Her Majesty in Council, or on the Privy Council, by Act of Parliament. The exercise of some of these functions is subject to the affirmative resolution procedure and of others to the negative resolution procedure; some orders made in exercise of such powers are required to be laid before Parliament but are not subject to annulment; the remainder are not subject to any form of parliamentary scrutiny. It would not be practical to tabulate the individual powers falling into these groups without disproportionate cost.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many times the royal prerogative has been used through the Privy Council to establish orders in the last 10 years.

Mr. MacGregor: It would not be possible to provide a precise answer except at disproportionate cost. Approximately 7,000 Orders in Council have been made in the last 10 years of which, it is estimated, some 20 per cent. have been prerogative orders, dealing with such matters as the prorogation and dissolution of Parliament, the grant and amendment of royal charters, the government of dependent territories and the approval of reports of the judicial committee of the Privy Council.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Walter Somers (Iraq)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement upon the contents of the press release of April 1990 by the firm Walter Somers referring to the clearing by his Department of exports of components to Iraq.

Mr. Lilley: The press release of 17 April 1990 from Eagle Trust plc, of which Walter Somers was at that time a subsidiary, refers to Walter Somers' dealings with the Department of Trade and Industry. These references correspond with my Department's records of its dealings with Walter Somers.

Foreign Currency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the countries for the last two years that have their currency printed in the United Kingdom; how many are covered by the export guarantee scheme; and if he will show in his answer those countries that were having their currency manufactured in the United Kingdom at the end of 1990.

Mr. Sainsbury: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, we do not disclose information on printing of foreign currencies.

Footwear Labelling

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the numbers of organisations that have made representations concerning the draft directive on footwear labelling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Following a request for comments on the draft directive on footwear labelling which officials in my Department sent to a wide range of bodies representing the interests of manufacturers, retailers and consumers, representations were received from 31 organisations.

There is general agreement on the need for Community rules on footwear labelling. The comments on the detail of the draft directive were communicated to the EC Commission and the first draft has now been revised. My

officials are continuing to consult all the interested parties and will seek to ensure in future discussions with the Commission that the common labelling rules ultimately agreed will be acceptable to all concerned.

Garston Amhurst

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to appoint inspectors to investigate the affairs of Garston Amhurst under the Companies Act.

Mr. Redwood: On 7 March 1990 compulsory winding-up orders were made against GAA Group Holdings Limited, Garston Amhurst Associates (London) Limited, Garston Amhurst Associates (Bristol) Limited, Garston Amhurst Associates (Financial Services) Limited and Garston Amhurst Associates (Financial Management) Limited. On 2 May 1990, Garston Amhurst (Mortgages) Ltd. was compulsorily wound up. As a result of inquiries by the Serious Fraud Office criminal charges have been preferred and three of the four directors charged have pleaded guilty. The trial of the fourth is expected to begin shortly. In the circumstances, I have no plans to appoint inspectors.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he plans to take any action against Garston Amhurst for its failure to file any accounts since 1985.

Mr. Redwood: There is no company currently registered under the name Garston Amhurst. There are, however, six similarly named companies on the register which are listed in the table, together with their current position.

Company name	*Current position*
Garston Amhurst Associates (Bristol) Limited	Compulsory Liquidation 18 May 1990
Garston Amhurst Associates (Financial Management) Limited	Compulsory Liquidation 14 June 1990
Garston Amhurst Associates (Financial Services) Limited	Compulsory Liquidation 18 May 1990
Garston Amhurst Associates (General) Limited	Directors convicted 14 August 1990
Garston Amhurst Associates (London) Limited	Compulsory Liquidation 15 June 1990
Garston Amhurst Mortgages Limited	Compulsory Liquidation 13 August 1990

It is not the Department's policy to pursue for outstanding accounts and annual returns once a company has been placed in compulsory liquidation. In the case of Garston Amhurst Associates (General) Limited, the directors were convicted for failing to submit accounts and annual returns and fined accordingly.

The registrar has confirmed that action is continuing to secure compliance.

Sound Diffusion plc

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will publish the inspectors' report on Sound Diffusion plc.

Mr. Redwood: I cannot say. The inspectors' report has not yet been submitted.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will take the necessary measures to reduce the time limits for filing annual company accounts with the registrar of companies.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will propose legislation under which the public limited companies would be required to file their accounts at Companies House within 90 days of the reporting year end.

Mr. Redwood: We have no immediate plans to reduce the time allowed for companies to deliver their accounts to the Registrar of Companies. While some reduction in the time periods allowed is a desirable longer-term objective, our present priority is to secure fuller compliance with the existing statutory requirements. The Government's efforts have resulted in a considerable improvement, but I am looking for a yet higher rate of compliance.

Auditing Practices Board

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his representative on the Auditing Practices Committee recommended the issue of a consultative document on the formation of the auditing practices board.

Mr. Redwood: The decision to issue a consultative document on the proposed Auditing Practices Board was a matter for the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies, not the Auditing Practices Committee. However, I welcome the consultative committee's decision to give everyone with an interest in auditing an opportunity to comment on and contribute constructively to the proposed new arrangements for setting auditing standards and issuing guidance to auditors.

Insolvency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a list of the investigations carried out under the Insolvency Act 1986 and its predecessors; and how many reports have been published on these investigations.

Mr. Redwood: Investigations under the Insolvency Act 1986 are carried out by official receivers in all cases where winding-up orders against companies or partnerships or bankruptcy orders against individuals have been made by a court.

Where official receivers' investigations reveal prima facie evidence of criminality they make reports which are considered by departmental solicitors who decide whether prosecution is appropriate. Such reports are not published.

Details of the reports submitted by official receivers alleging possible criminal offences are published in the

insolvency general annual report. For 1987, 1988 and 1989 the number of reports submitted was 499, 567 and 627 respectively.

Non-life Insurance Business

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the recommendations of the review of non-life insurance business conducted by Mr. Geoffrey Hunt and announced in a written answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) of 23 June 1988, *Official Report*, columns *641-42*, showing those upon which action has been taken and indicating that further action is proposed.

Mr. Redwood: It became apparent during the study that there was no widespread pressure for change to returns made to the Department by insurance companies. Mr. Hunt did not therefore make any recommendations for change.

ECGD

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state the cumulative exposure of long-term project assistance under the Export Credits Guarantee Department *(a)* in total and *(b)* on a country by country basis as at 31 march 1983, 1988 and 1990.

Mr. Sainsbury: Total amounts at risk in respect of project business are included in ECGD's annual trading accounts, copies of which are in the Library. As a matter of general policy, ECGD's exposure on individual countries is not made public.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what was the number of applications for ECGD cover in each of the years since 1980 distinguishing between short-term cover and long-term cover; and what was the number of applications accepted in each case;

(2) what was the number of applications for EGCD cover in countries now part of the European Community in each year since 1980, distinguishing between short-term cover and long-term project cover.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* The information which the hon. Member has requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Accountancy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what date has been set for the commencement of the statutory audit regulation system provided for by the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: No date has been set. However, we hope that the relevant provisions of the Act will be commenced by 1 July 1991.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has approved *(a)* the staffing, *(b)* the salary structure and *(c)* the fees to support the joint monitoring unit set up to supervise the statutory audit regulation system provided for by the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State has not yet determined the applications for recognition he has received from supervisory bodies for auditors under the Companies Act 1989. He will only approve the applications if he is satisfied that the applicants have among other things adequate arrangements and resources for the effective monitoring and enforcement of compliance with their rules.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will provide additional funding to enable the Accounting Standards Board to have full-time independent members.

Mr. Redwood: The composition of the Accounting Standards Board is a matter for the Financial Reporting Council. Both the chairman and technical director of the board are full-time, and the seven other members are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, including users, preparers and auditors of accounts.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will hold a public hearing prior to making a decision on the award of supervisory status to any accountancy body under the powers created under the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: No. But we are very willing to consider any relevant representations we receive.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Leigh: The Department is working towards a non-smoking working environment. At present, smoking is prohibited in most common areas including conference rooms, most meeting rooms, libraries, waiting rooms, reception areas, lifts and toilets. Smoking is banned in any office where a majority of staff vote for such a ban. Copies of the Department's policy statement on smoking and an example of a notice to visitors to the Department have been placed in the House Library.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Department's policy has been jointly agreed between management and the departmental trade union side.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the aim group, and what percentage of the guarantee group are currently on employment training.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested. We estimate that: 20 per cent. of those unemployed people who joined the guarantee group in the year April 1989 to March 1990 started on employment training; and 35 per cent. of those unemployed people in the aim group at April 1989, or who joined it in the following 12 months, started on employment training.

Sheltered Employment

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on provision for sheltered workshops and the sheltered placement scheme in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Howard: As last year's consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" made clear, we are committed to providing sheltered employment for people with severe disabilities. In the current financial year we are providing funds for an average of 5,550 people in sheltered workshops and 6,700 people under the sheltered placement scheme. In this financial year, in order to help meet the costs incurred by sponsors we have already increased the annual grant ceiling per place for voluntary bodies by £200 to £3,480 and that for local authorities by £130 to £2,730. I am now further increasing these grant ceilings for this financial year by £40 to £3,520 and by £30 to £2,760 respectively.

In 1991-92 I am providing £4·3 million more than this year's provision for sheltered workshops and the sheltered placement scheme. These additional funds will again be used to help meet the costs of voluntary bodies and local authorities by increasing the grant ceilings by a further £280 and £240 respectively to bring them to £3,800 for voluntary bodies and £3,000 for local authorities.

In addition, I shall be making available just under £6 million in 1991-92 for capital expenditure which represents an increase of just over £2 million on expenditure this year. This money will be available to help meet the cost of essential refurbishment and development where that is clearly consistent with our long-term objectives for sheltered employment. I expect that some money will also be available in 1991-92 for innovative or experimental activities aimed at exploring the scope for improving the way in which the provision is made.

Pressure on resources both within the sheltered employment programme and elsewhere has meant that I have had to decide that the average number of places nationally in both these forms of sheltered provision will remain the same in 1991-92. However, previous patterns of turnover on the sheltered placement scheme indicate that some 1,000 existing places are likely to become vacant to allow new entrants to join the programme.

I will be considering future sheltered employment provision, including the balance between the sheltered placement scheme and other forms of sheltered employment, in the light of comments received on the consultative document. However, research reported by Social and Community Planning Research in "Employment and Handicap" and discussed in the consultative document revealed that a substantial number of severely disabled people are in open employment or self employment but not under the sheltered placement scheme. It is clearly important that we know more about how such severely disabled people manage without the support offered by the sheltered employment programme and the Employment Service has therefore commissioned research to explore this matter further.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Forth: The policy of the Employment Department group is to discourage non-smokers from taking up smoking, positively to encourage smokers to give it up or to cut down and to create a smoke-free environment, with facilities for those who wish to smoke, rather than the other way round. In offices where it is the wish of the staff no-smoking agreements have either been implemented or are in the process of negotiation.

David Holt Plastics, Haslingden

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the occasions on which factory inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive visited the premises of David Holt Plastics, Haslingden, Rossendale; and what action resulted from each visit.

Mr. Forth: The table shows the occasions on which Factory Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive have visited David Holt Plastics, Haslingden, Rossendale and the action taken by HSE as a result of each visit:

Date of Visit	*Action taken*
25 May 1988	Immediate Prohibition Notice Issued
26 May 1988	Advice given as a result of continuing investigation into fatal accident
31 May 1988	
2 June 1988	Advice given
10 June 1988	Advice given as a result of continuing investigation into fatal accident
30 August 1988	
31 January 1988	Advice given
11 July 1989	Advice given
20 August 1989	Advice given
31 August 1989	Advice given
26 January 1990	Advice given
25 April 1990	Letter sent
30 April 1990	Advice given

NORTHERN IRELAND

District Councils

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what categories of district council community centres, if any, are liable to be rated by his Department.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Commissioner of Valuation must assess rateable values for all premises and there are no categories of property which are automatically granted exemption.

Applications for exemption for district council community centres, or whatever property, are determined on the facts in each case.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Since the introduction in October 1987 of a formal policy on smoking in the Northern Ireland civil service, smoking has been specifically prohibited in:

(a) conference rooms when used for meetings of civil servants;

(b) training rooms;

(c) lifts;

(d) official cars;

(e) kitchens, other cooking facilities and mess rooms, and food stores;

(f) public counters and security/reception points.

The introduction of further prohibitions is a matter for local management, the staff and the local trade union side, usually after an attitude survey has been conducted. To date over 300 attitude surveys have been undertaken, resulting in partial or total restrictions. Where total restrictions are in force smoking rooms have been provided for those who choose to continue to smoke.

Management in the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) also endorse the ideal of non-smoking as a safeguard to health. The introduction of a non-smoking policy is being actively pursued in the Northern Ireland Office in Belfast and is under review for the London office.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he proposes to take to complete the early designations of areas of special scientific interest; and whether he has set a target date for completion.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Environment Committee, in its recent report on environmental issues in Northern Ireland, recommended that sufficient resources be allocated to ensure that the process of ASSI designation can be completed within eight years. I am at present examining the recommendations in this report. The Government's response to the report will take the form of a Command Paper and I would not wish to pre-empt that response at this stage.

Peat Bogs

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to ensure the conservation of peat bogs in the Province.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has taken action to ensure the conservation of peat bogs in a number of ways. Five peat bogs are managed as national nature reserves and to date a total of eight lowland raised bogs and one upland raised bog have been declared as areas of special scientific interest. In addition the Department has opened a visitor centre at the Peatlands park, County Tyrone, the main emphasis of which is the interpretation of the history, exploitation, uses and future of peat. Extensive surveys of peatland areas have been and are being carried out.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will list those areas of peat bog which meet the criteria for designation as areas of special scientific interest.

Mr. Needham: The following lowland raised peat bogs meet the criteria for declaration as areas of special scientific interest (ASSI) and have been declared:

Black Bog, County Tyrone
Dunloy Bog, County Antrim
Fairy Water Bogs, County Tyrone (a complex of 3 bogs)
Garry Bog, County Antrim
Moneygal Bog, County Tyrone
Moninea Bog, County Fermanagh

On the basis of surveys carried out eight of the nine lowland raised bogs of highest nature conservation interest have been declared as ASSIs. The other lowland raised bog was not declared as an ASSI as the result of the decision to permit the commercial extraction of peat which was made after taking account of the report of the Planning Appeals Commission which had conducted a public inquiry. One upland raised bog area at Teal Lough and Slaghtfreeden, Counties Tyrone and Londonderry has been declared an ASSI. Further bogs which are identified as meeting the criteria will be declared as ASSIs.

EC Directives

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he proposes to take to ensure that EC directives are implemented in the Province at the same pace as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is the responsibility of individual Departments in Northern Ireland to ensure that EC directives within their area of responsibility are complied with by the due date required by the EC. In doing so they follow the same procedures used in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Breathalyser Tests

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of breathalyser tests carried out in Northern Ireland between 19 December 1990 and 1 January 1991; how many of these proved positive; and what was the number of tests for the same period in 1989.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* A total of 187 breathalyser tests were carried out in Northern Ireland during the period 19 December 1990 to 1 January 1991 and 61 of these proved positive. Corresponding figures for 1989-90 are 128 and 53.

SCOTLAND

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss unemployment in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I intend to meet the General Council of the Scottish Trades Union Congress on Friday of this week to discuss matters affecting the Scottish economy.

Inverclyde Economy

16. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Inverclyde district council; and if they discussed inter alia, the local economy and its industrial base.

Mr. Allan Stewart: On 18 January 1991, and on behalf of my right hon. Friend, I discussed industrial development in the area, and the Inverclyde enterprise zone in particular, with a delegation from the council and the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham).

Local Government Finance

20. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to abolish the poll tax.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government are at present conducting a careful and fundamental review of the community charge arrangements. At this stage we are not ruling particular options in or out.

23. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish university students and student nurses to discuss the poll tax and its effects on their activities.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about the community charge from and on behalf of students and student nurses.

24. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current levels of poll tax payments in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is not held centrally. I understand however that most levying authorities have already collected or expect to collect at least 95 per cent. of the budgeted revenue due to them from community charges in respect of 1989-90 and that their collection rates for 1990-91 are at present broadly in line with last year's pattern.

31. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's consideration of alternative systems of local government finance.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government are at present conducting a careful and fundamental review of the community charge arrangements. We have not ruled particular options out or in.

Health Board Allocations

22. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will reconsider his financial allocation to Scottish health boards for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No, Sir.

Ambulance Service

25. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from general practitioners in Grampian region about the centralisation of ambulance service call-out procedures.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The only recent representations which I have received have been from the hon. Member on behalf of the general practitioners at Keith.

Health Services, Grampian

26. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of Grampian health board to discuss the provision of health services in the region.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I hold regular meetings with all health board chairmen to discuss issues affecting the national health service in Scotland.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

27. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had this year with the National Farmers Union of Scotland about the total livestock compensatory allowance.

Mr. Lang: The annual meeting between Agriculture Ministers and the four national farming unions to discuss the economic situation in the hills and uplands took place on 23 October 1990 and my predecessor attended. There have been no further meetings since then.

Council House Sales

28. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy on the sale of council houses and its effect on the housing problem in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government's policy on council house sales is to extend freedom of choice to many who otherwise would have no option but to continue renting. Of the 210,000 public sector houses which have been sold, over 203,000 have been bought by the sitting tenants.

Since April 1979 public sector sales have released some £1·4 billion in extra resources for local authorities through capital receipts, which can be used for new public sector provision, for modernising or improving existing stock, or for reducing outstanding capital debt. This benefits remaining council tenants, either through increased capital investment on council housing or through loan charges and rent rises being less than they would otherwise have been.

Sunday Trading

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received advocating the imposition of restrictions on Sunday trading in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the previous 12 months one representation has been received advocating the imposition of restrictions on Sunday trading in Scotland.

30. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to changes in the Scottish Sunday trading laws.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: With one small exception relating to hairdressers and barbers, the restrictions on Sunday trading in the Shops Act 1950 do not apply in Scotland. My right hon. Friend has no present proposals for changes in the existing law.

Manufacturing Productivity

32. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of manufacturing productivity in Scotland in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* the latest date for which he has figures.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The latest available figures relate to 1989. Information on Scottish manufacturing productivity in 1979, 1987 and 1989 are set out in the following table:

1985 = 100

	1979	*1987*	*1989*
Manufacturing output	103·3	100·8	113·5
Manufacturing employment	139·5	94·2	97·4
Manufacturing productivity	74·1	107·0	116·5

Source: Index of Production and Construction for Scotland ED quarterly employment surveys.

Between 1979 and 1989 Scottish manufacturing productivity increased by 4·6 per cent. per annum, a rate of growth greater than that of the United Kingdom, Canada, United States of America, west Germany, France, Japan or Italy.

Rail Services

33. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to have discussions with ScotRail regarding the adequacy of rail services in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I meet senior management of ScotRail from time to time. Contacts at official level also take place frequently. Discussions at such meetings cover a wide range of topics concerning rail services in Scotland.

Elderly People

34. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what he is doing to assist local councils to finance services for the elderly.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend provides resources through the aggregate external finance settlement. This is not hypothecated to services to particular client groups: it is for individual regional, islands and district councils to allocate their resources in accordance with local needs and priorities.

Primary School Pupils

35. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the testing of primary school pupils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce).

Opencast Mining, Douglas Valley

36. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish region of the British Coal opencast executive to discuss LAW Mining Companies' application to opencast coal in the Douglas valley.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has not met the opencast executive to discuss this matter.

Government Structure

37. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration has been given by his Department in the last year to possible changes in the structure of government in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: As my right hon. Friend considers that the creation of a separate Scottish legislative body would be harmful to Scotland's interests, no such consideration has been given. Questions about the functions and structure of local government will be looked at in the course of the review of the community charge. Any constructive suggestions received in the context of that review will be welcome.

Scottish Industry

38. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received recently from Scottish industrialists about the prospects for Scottish industry.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am in constant informal contact with Scottish industrialists through meetings and visits to companies as part of my normal business. This provides regular opportunities to discuss matters of concern.

More specifically I met representatives of the Scottish CBI on 23 January. A wide-ranging discussion was held covering issues of importance to the Scottish economy.

Scottish Constitutional Convention

39. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet representatives of the Scottish Constitutional Convention to discuss its report.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Steel Industry

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest assessment of the contribution of the steel industry to the Scottish economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In 1989 the steel industry's output amounted to about three quarters of a per cent. of total Scottish output.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Lang: In April 1990 smoking restrictions were applied, permitting smoking in working rooms during specified periods only. Since October 1990 smoking has not been permitted in working rooms at any time. Areas in each main building have been set aside for use by smokers. Special counselling services were arranged for 262 smokers who requested them.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: All staff in the Scottish Office work in smoke-free conditions. Since 1 October 1990 smoking has not been permitted except in areas set aside for this purpose.

Housing Associations

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for the monitoring of the activities of housing associations; and on what date they will become effective.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Section 4 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 gives Scottish Homes statutory responsibility for registering and monitoring housing associations in Scotland. Scottish Homes inherited comprehensive monitoring powers from the Housing Corporation in Scotland and in addition has issued performance standards for housing associations which it, and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations expect associations to work towards.

Community Charge

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his most recent estimate of the percentage of community charge payers yet to pay the 1990 poll tax *(a)* in Scotland, *(b)* in Strathclyde and *(c)* in Inverclyde; and what is his estimate of the additional cost per poll tax payer required to make good the deficit.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is not available centrally.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of sites of special scientific interest which have been opposed under schedule 11.4.1(a) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; how many local hearings have been held and in relation to which sites; how many proposed sites of special scientific interest designations have been withdrawn as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is a right of objection to notification of a site of special scientific interest, but there is no provision for hearings to be held. However, after notification, where there is dispute about the operations that may be carried out on such a site, my right hon. Friend may make a nature conservation order under section 29 of the Act and schedule 11 of the Act describes the procedures to be followed which include provision for a local inquiry or hearing.

To date five such cases have resulted in local inquiries. They are as follows:

Loch of Strathbeg (Banff and Buchan)
North Fetlar (Shetland)
Culbin Foreshore (Nairn)
Kinneil Kerse (Falkirk)
Loch Obisary (Western Isles)

In the first four cases the reporter recommended and my right hon. Friend agreed that the order be confirmed as each area meets the criteria of special scientific interest set out in section 29(1) and (2) of the 1981 Act. A determination in the last case will issue soon.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been raised from the sale of Forestry Commission land and woodlands during the past 10 years; and what is the anticipated income from sales to the year 2000.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 February 1991]:* A total of £137 million was raised from the sale of Forestry Commission land and property between 1981, when the disposals programme started, and 31 March 1990, the latest date for which figures are available. It is anticipated that a similar sum will be raised from further sales to the year 2000.

Health Education Board

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the subject of the new Health Education Board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Health Education Board for Scotland, which will replace the Scottish health education group, will come into operation on 1 April 1991. It will be the national centre for health education, expertise and information and will undertake campaigns at a national level, with particular reference to the priority areas of coronary heart disease, cancer, smoking, AIDS, drug misuse, alcohol misuse and accidents set out in the consultation document "Health Education in Scotland: A National Policy Statement". The additional funds I am making available will give the new board a budget of £5·1 million in 1991-92.

I am pleased to be able to announce that the following persons have accepted the Secretary of State's invitation to serve as members of the new board under the chairmanship of Mr. Ernie Walker, OBE:

Mr. David Campbell, Chairman, West Independent Newspapers Ltd;
Mr. John Christie, Assistant Director of Education, Tayside Regional Council;
Miss Wilma Craigmile, MBE, formerly Director of Nursing Services, Tayside Health Board;
Professor Charles Forbes, Professor of Medicine, University of Dundee;
Dr. Nancy Loudon, Vice-President, Family Planning Association;
Professor Doreen Parry, Professor of Dietetics and Nutrition, Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh;
Mr. Jimmy Reid, journalist and broadcaster;
Professor Rex Taylor, Professor of Social Administration and Social Work, University of Glasgow;
Mr. Raymond Watkins, Chief Administrative Dental Officer, Forth Valley Health Board;
Mr. David Woods, Managing Director, Scottish Provident Institution.

In addition, the general manager of the board, when appointed, will become an executive member.

The board will have a vital role in tackling Scotland's health problems. I am confident that its work will be greatly facilitated by the wide range of interests, expertise and skills which the chairman and members will bring to bear.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the main changes to national insurance benefits and the savings or expenditure which accrued from each change since 1979 in *(a)* cash prices and *(b)* 1990 prices.

Mr. Jack: Between 1978-79 and 1990-91, expenditure on national insurance benefits has grown by almost £20 billion in cash terms and by £3·7 billion in real terms. The cost and savings which have accrued from the main policy changes to national insurance benefits since 1979 are set out in the table.

Changes to national insurance benefits: estimated expenditure effects

Great Britain: £ million

	Financial year introduced	[1]*Cash effect*	*Cash effect 1990-91 prices*
Uprating of long-term benefits by prices	1981-82	−280	−470
5 per cent. abatement in uprating of invalidity benefit, unemployment benefit, sickness benefit and maternity allowance	1981-82	−160	−270
Abolition of earnings related supplements to short-term benefits	1982-83	−390	−610
Introduction of statutory sick pay[2]	1983-84	−10	−10
Restoration of 5 per cent. abatement of unemployment benefit	1984-85	80	110
Offsetting of invalidity benefit age addition by additional pension	1986-87	−140	−180
Restoration of 5 per cent. abatement of invalidity benefit	1986-87	120	160
Extension of statutory sick pay[2]	1986-87	−80	−100
Introduction of statutory maternity pay[2]	1987-88	40	50
Unemployment benefit abatement for occupational/personal pension reduced from age 60 to 55	1988-89	−63	−70
Weekly earnings rule introduced for unemployment benefit	1989-90		
Unemployment benefit "full extent normal" rule—de minimis provision	1989-90	−49	−50
"Actively seeking work" test for unemployment benefit	1989-90		
Abolition of pensioners earnings rule	1989-90	375	410
Widows: revised entitlement conditions for women widowed before April 1988	1989-90	13	14
Statutory sick pay: amendment of rates and higher/lower rate threshold	1990-91	−72	−72

[1] Figures shown represent the initial estimates of the effect on national insurance benefit expenditure only in the first full year following implementation. No account is taken of the impact of the changes on administration costs, income tax and national insurance contribution revenues or expenditure on income-related benefits, other than as shown in note 2.

[2] Amounts shown represent the net effect on national insurance benefit expenditure after employers' recoveries from contributions to the national insurance fund in respect of payments of statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay to their employees.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to receive recommendations from the Government Actuary on the level of contributions to the national insurance fund necessary to prevent it running into deficit after 1993.

Mr. Jack: The exact level of contributions needed in the 1993-94 year will be considered as a result of advice from the Government Actuary in the autumn of 1992. The fund is projected to keep its level above the minimum recommended by the Government Actuary.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time taken to process applications for each of the benefits administered by his Department.

Miss Widdecombe: The average length of time taken to process benefit claims over the period 1 April 1990 to 31 December 1990 for the major benefits administered by the Department is in the following table.

	Days
Attendance allowance	41·6
Income support	5·0
Invalid care allowance	38·5
Mobility allowance	34·3
Retirement pension	20·3
Sickness/invalidity benefit	9·2
Social fund	
i. Budget loan	5·1
ii. Community care grant	7·2
iii. Crisis loan	0·4

	X per cent.	*In Y days*
Child benefit (straightforward)	96·0	in 5
Child benefit (not straightforward)	88·2	in 16
Family credit	63·3	in 20
One-parent benefit	88·3	in 12
Retirement pension	85·7	in 30
War disablement pension	30·7	in 125
War widow's pension	44·6	in 50

Annual Report

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish his Department's annual report.

Mr. Jack: Our departmental report was published on Friday 1 February 1991 and copies were placed in the Vote Office and the Library.

Road Fund Licences

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his policy towards extending the road fund licence concession to those who are made immobile after their 66th birthday.

Mr. Scott: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Operational Strategy

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on progress on implementing the operational strategy.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's strategy for the computerisation of the social security payment system, which will be completed by July 1991, is proceeding as planned. The aims of the strategy are better service to the public through faster turnaround of claims, faster response to inquiries and less risk of payment errors; better value for the taxpayer by reducing the number of staff needed to administer social security; more satisfying jobs for staff by automating repetitive or tedious tasks thus enabling them to provide a better service to the public. By 21 January 1991, of a total of 451 offices, 411 had received the departmental central index, 402 the retirement pensions system, and 348 the income support system.

Social Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund loan applications were refused by each of his Department's offices in Nottingham in *(a)* 1989-90 and *(b)* 1990 to date due to perceived inability to repay; and what advice was given to those refused.

Mr. Scott: The table shows the number of applications recorded as refused on grounds of inability to repay. All decision letters advise applicants of their right to ask for a review and refer to the citizens advice bureau or a local law centre as a source of general advice. Money advice is normally offered to applicants discovered to be in financial difficulties, including such cases where an applicant is refused because of a perceived inability to repay.

	1989-90	*1990 to December 1990*
Castlegate	62	31
David Lane	100	73
Shakespeare Street	15	16
Station Street	41	39

Expenditure

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update to 1989-90 his answer of 26 January 1989 to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory), *Official Report*, columns *711-12*, giving the proportion of the real growth in social security expenditure attributable to increases in the number of beneficiaries and to increases in the average amounts of benefit paid.

Mr. Jack: Between 1978-79 and 1989-90, social security programme expenditure has increased by 36 per cent. in real terms, from £38·5 billion to £52·2 billion at 1989-90 prices. The Government's commitment to meeting genuine needs has seen social security spending rise from 26 per cent. of public spending in 1978-79 to 32 per cent. in 1989-90.

The main groups benefiting from the growth of the programme have been:

Pensioners: expenditure on the elderly has increased by about £5·2 billion in real terms. This substantial rise in social security spending has taken place at the same time as the rapid growth of occupational and personal pensions and the higher income from savings which many pensioners now enjoy. The result is that pensioners' incomes from all sources have increased by 31 per cent. between 1979 and 1987.

Long-term sick and disabled: expenditure has grown by 105 per cent.—almost £4·4 billion—in real terms. A total of 590,000 more people now receive invalidity benefit than in 1978-79 and the numbers receiving attendance allowance have increased by 530,000. The numbers receiving mobility allowance have increased sixfold from 95,000 to 585,000 over the period.

The family: total benefit support for the family has increased by 28 per cent. in real terms over the period. Spending on family credit in 1989-90 was £425 million. This is more than double the spending on family income support which it replaced.

It is not possible to produce a meaningful breakdown of expenditure changes, for the reasons detailed in the answer to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 26 February 1990 at column *64*.

Claimants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will conduct a study into the correlation between reducing levels of unemployment benefit claims and increasing levels of invalidity benefit claims; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Department is already planning further research into the reasons for increasing numbers of invalidity benefit recipients. Factors such as the relationship with unemployment will form part of this work.

SERPS

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage of costs in fees, commissions and administration of the state earnings related pension scheme; and what are the comparable costs for personal pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department does not keep separate accounts of the administrative costs of the state earnings-related pension scheme; neither does it keep information on the costs in fees, commissions or administration costs for personal pensions, as these are a matter for the individual providers.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of vibration white finger have been acknowledged by, and what was the total sum paid out in each of, his Department's offices in Newcastle and Gateshead between September 1989 and December 1990.

Mr. Scott: Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Care Homes

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of financial difficulties facing private nursing homes for the elderly.

Miss Widdecombe: We have taken account of representations of interested organisations and also the survey of costs conducted on behalf of the Department by management consultants Price Waterhouse. On 24 October my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced a very substantial increase on the limit for the elderly in nursing homes of £45 a week—£55 in London —from April this year. The limit is now fairly set in relation to median costs in homes across the country.

Severe Weather Payments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole (i) the total number of recipients and (ii) the total values of the payments in (1) cash and (2) constant terms, under the exceptionally severe weather payments in each year from 1979-80 to 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the following table.

Scotland

Year	*Greenock*			*Port Glasgow*			*Strathclyde*			*Scotland*		
	Number of payments (000s)	*Amount (£000s)*	*Real value (£000s)*	*Number of payments (000s)*	*Amount (£000s)*	*Real value (£000s)*	*Number of payments (000s)*	*Amount (£000s)*	*Real value (£000s)*	*Number of payments (000s)*	*Amount (£000s)*	*Real value (£000s)*
1979-80 No scheme												
1980-81 No figures available												
1981-82	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1982-83	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1983-84	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1984-85	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1985-86	1·9	49·9	67·1	1·1	25·7	34·5	53·3	1,198·3	1,610·8	84·2	1,928·0	2,591·7
1986-87	7·9	39·5	51·3	10·2	50·8	66·1	216·4	1,082·1	1,406·6	291·2	1,455·9	1,892·4
1987-88	2·3	11·3	13·9	1·2	6·1	7·5	47·9	241·2	297·3	84·7	426·6	525·9
1988-89	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·5	2·5	2·8
1989-90	1·8	17·8	20·5	0·9	9·0	10·3	47·0	438·9	504·2	48·2	444·7	510·9
1990-91 Figures not yet available												

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the temperatures used to trigger severe weather payments recorded in each of the weather stations used for Greenock, Port Glasgow and Gourock for each day during the last two weeks of 1990 and those weeks in January 1991, for which figures are available.

Mr. Scott: A weather station will trigger if there has been a period of seven consecutive days, during which the average mean daily temperature is 0 deg. Centigrade or less. Glasgow airport weather station, which is the weather station relevant to Greenock, Port Glasgow and Gourock, did not trigger on any day during the last two weeks of 1990. The only time to date that the weather has been severe enough to trigger cold weather payments in Greenock, Port Glasgow and Gourock was on Wednesday 16 January when the seven day running mean temperature was recorded as −0·2 deg. Centigrade.

Full details of average mean daily temperatures recorded at all the weather stations can be found in the Library.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's current non-smoking policy, aimed at introducing extensive smoke-free areas in all DSS offices, was introduced in July 1989. A review of progress in June last year revealed that nearly 80 per cent. of the offices had introduced smoke-free working areas. In the remaining offices local discussions towards introducing smoke-free working areas were continuing.

DEFENCE

Ammunition

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the position of ammunition with respect to the list of products agreed by the European Council on 15 April 1958, to be included within the provisions of paragraph 1(b) of article 223 of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Alan Clark: Artillery ammunition and ammunition for automatic and portable firearms is included in the EEC Council list of items defining the scope of paragraph 1(b) of article 223 of the treaty of Rome. Ammunition for sporting guns, pistols and other small arms of a calibre less than 7mm is excluded from this list.

Gulf War (Journalists)

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure access if accredited Scottish journalists to Scottish units serving in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Opportunities have been provided for Scottish journalists to have access to Scottish units serving in the Gulf and I would expect further such opportunities to be provided.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the availability of spare parts for Tornado aircraft sold by Britain to Saudi Arabia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. It has not been the practice of this or previous Administrations to comment on the details of specific sales.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress of implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Further to my hon. Friend's reply of 29 January 1990, it remains the Department's policy to discourage smoking. New guidance is being prepared which brings to the attention of staff the latest research into the dangers of smoking. Non-smoking areas continue to be established in the Department's buildings in response to the wishes of staff. A number of new proposals for such areas are currently under consideration. We are also considering banning smoking in all conference rooms in the Department's buildings.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he will consider the immediate construction of a national network of incinerators to destroy proscribed cattle offal and the carcases of BSE-affected cattle;

(2) what is his estimate of the proportion of slaughtered BSE-affected cattle that are *(a)* incinerated, *(b)* buried in licensed landfills and *(c)* buried by farmers under their own land.

Mr. Maclean: The information for BSE carcases is as follows:

	Per cent.
Incinerated	83·3
Buried on licensed landfill sites	16·4
Used for research	0·2
Buried on farm	0·1

New incineration capacity is expected to become available later this year.

Specified bovine offal is banned from any use in human or animal food and must be disposed of within the framework of health and environmental restrictions.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will advise dairy farmers not to bury under their land slaughtered cattle suspected or confirmed as having contracted BSE;

(2) if he will consider introducing a ban on the indiscriminate burial of BSE-affected cattle on farms.

Mr. Maclean: The disposal of animals slaughtered as suspect BSE cases is the responsibility of the state veterinary service (SVS). On farm burial is used only when other options are not available and is strictly supervised by the SVS to ensure there is no risk to human or animal health. In 1990 only 19 out of 16,432 carcases were buried on farm.

Mr. Marland: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made to set up the review of the animal feed industry announced in the Government's reply to the fifth report of the Agriculture Committee, Session 1989-90, on bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Gummer: The Government undertook to establish a small group of experts to review the regulation of the whole animal feed industry in its response to a recommendation of the fifth report of Agriculture Select Committee, 1989-90. I am now able to announce that the group of experts has been set up. It comprises:

Professor Lamming—Chairman, Professor of Animal Physiology, Nottingham University
Professor Thomas, Principal and Chief executive of the Scottish Agricultural College
Mr. Colin Maclean, Technical Director, Meat and Livestock Commission
Dr. Mary Cooke, Deputy Director Public Health Laboratory Service

The terms of reference are:

"To review the existing regulatory framework covering the animal feed industry in the United Kingdom. To advise on whether any improvements are required in the mechanisms by which the responsible Departments take account of food safety requirements in regulating the industry and to report to Ministers by the end of 1991".

The first meeting of the group will be held very shortly.

Food (Intervention Storage)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish *(a)* a table showing the tonnage and value of various foodstuffs in intervention storage (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in the EEC and *(b)* give these quantities as a percentage of annual output.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is shown in the table:

	Intervention stocks ('000 tonnes)	*Value (£ million)*[1]	*Stock as percentage of annual production (1989)*
United Kingdom			
Butter	23	14·98	18
SMP	7	4·13	5
Cereals	631	20·25	3
Beef	74	81·82	8

	Intervention stocks ('000 tonnes)	Value (£ million)[1]	Stock as percentage of annual production (1989)
EC			
Butter	243	188·03	14
SMP	336	218·33	24
Cereals	12,417	790·96	8
Beef	[2]210	166·63	3
Olive Oil	71	62·86	5
Dried Fruit	37	8·65	30
Tobacco	87	17·92	21

[1] Values (except for dried fruit) from 1991 preliminary draft budget, representing end-year depreciated value of stock. Dried fruit value based on current disposal prices.
[2] Latest published figure. Informal Commission estimates are that stocks are currently around 700,000 tonnes.

Quick Frozen Food

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Government's definition of quick frozen food.

Mr. Maclean: Quick frozen foodstuff is defined in the Quick Frozen Foodstuffs Regulations 1990 which came into force on 10 January this year.

Decommissioning Schemes

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to implement proposals in line with EEC guidelines, following the decision by the Council of Ministers in December 1990, to increase the advance for decommissioning schemes.

Mr. Curry: The Government have no plans to introduce a decommissioning scheme.

Irradiation

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications for a licence to irradiate food have so far been received.

Mr. Maclean: No formal application has yet been made.

Organic Farming

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what environmental protection and nature conservation provisions will be required of recipients of specific support schemes for organic farming.

Mr. Curry: There are no specific support schemes for organic farming, but farmers are able to benefit from a number of general schemes. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on 14 December 1990 (*Official Report*, c. *539*). The standards established by the United Kingdom register of organic food standards and by other organic sector bodies already contain relevant provisions for the conservation of the environment. However, it is too early to say what additional requirements might form part of any specific support schemes for organic farming, the introduction of which is dependent on agreement in Brussels.

Deer

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has conducted into the grazing of wild deer on spring grass in the west country.

Mr. Curry: None.

Sugar

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what level he estimates the stockpile of sugar in the EC to be for the marketing year 1990-91; and what have been the actual levels in the last five years.

Mr. Curry: There has been no sugar in EC intervention stores during the 1990-91 marketing year. The following maximum quantities of sugar were held in intervention in each of the last five years for limited periods of time:

	Tonnes
1985-86	122,000
1986-87	835,700
1987-88	50,000
1988-89	Nil
1989-90	Nil

Food Irradiation

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences have been granted for the irradiation of food in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: No licences to irradiate food have yet been granted. All applications will require detailed consideration by experts—including a full physical inspection of premises by qualified personnel. Information on any licence issued will be published in the London and Edinburgh Gazettes.

Food Research

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department will produce its programme for the research to be commissioned from the Institute of Food Research in 1991-92.

Mr. Curry: A programme of work for 1991-92 is currently under discussion with the Institute of Food Research and will be issued as soon as possible.

Coastal Defence

Mr. Ward: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government have any plans to develop a national plan on coastal defence which would include clear regional strategic plans for local authorities.

Mr. Curry: In allocating grant to the National Rivers Authority and to local authorities empowered under the Land Drainage Act 1976 and the Coast Protection Act 1949 to undertake coastal defence work, this Department has full information on the forward capital coastal defence programmes of those authorities, and gives highest priority to schemes giving protection to people and property. The Department also funds the national flood and coastal defence research and development programme

with the aim inter alia, of developing understanding of coastal processes and improving design of coastal defences. This strategy ensures that Government funding is provided at the appropriate level and is used to the best possible effect. We have no plans to change the nature of these arrangements but we do expect to develop even closer liaison between this Department and authorities in order to add to the effectiveness of our respective planning procedures.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing a smoke-free policy throughout his Department;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every non-smoking employee in his Department has the right to work in a smoke-free area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: This Department has continued to develop non-smoking regimes in our buildings taking account of local circumstances. Restrictions already apply at many locations and a formal departmental policy statement is to be issued shortly with the intention of further extending such regimes. The general approach is to discourage smoking on official premises while providing some separate facilities for smokers.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held on 4 and 5 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting together with my hon. Friend, the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the Parliamentary Secretary in my Department.

The Council had before it a Commission paper on the future of the common agricultural policy. This contained few figures and made no specific proposals, but suggested that a revised common agricultural policy should have as a principal aim keeping as many farmers as possible on the land. The revised policy could involve significantly lower prices and higher direct payments to producers, the latter being modulated in favour of small producers.

I welcomed the Commission's willingness to contemplate radical reform of the common agricultural policy, but pointed out that the Commission's ideas seemed likely to involve a considerable increase in Community expenditure, probably to levels well above the agreed guideline; would place the more efficient and competitive Community producers at a disadvantage compared to their international competitors; and would involve unacceptable discrimination between member states. Several other Ministers expressed similar hesitations.

It is not clear what action the Commission will now take. It must in any case shortly produce price proposals for 1991-92 but Ministers made it clear that these were a separate matter.

The Council voted (with the United Kingdom voting against) to bring producers' direct sales of yogurt, ice cream and certain other milk products within the scope of Community rules on milk quotas for the first time. It was not possible, on this occasion, to complete parliamentary scrutiny of changes to the milk quota arrangements prior to adoption. This was due to the Commission's precipitate action in bringing the matter before the Council and the Presidency's putting the matter to the vote.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 7 February 1991

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Reliefs

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the value of the main tax reliefs and the saving that would occur if these were restricted to the basic rate of tax.

Mr. Maude: The latest estimates of the costs of direct tax reliefs and allowances for 1990-91 are published in Cm. 1520 "Public Expenditure Analyses to 1993-94" statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement. The direct revenue yields in a full year at 1990-91 levels of income from restricting the following main income tax reliefs to the basic rate are estimated at:

	£ million
Mortgage interest relief[1]	470
Relief on contribution to personal pensions[2]	[3]130
Relief on employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes	220

[1] Assuming that mortgage interest rates remain at their current levels for the remainder of 1990-91.
[2] Including relief for retirement annuity premia and free standing additional voluntary contributions.
[3] This estimate is subject to a wide margin of error.

Advisory Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the issues and the departments for which the firms Herbert Smith and Associates, Slaughter and May, and Kleinwort Benson have been used by the Government since 1983.

Mr. Maude: The tables show the issues, sponsoring departments and in which positions the firms of Herbert Smith and Associates, Slaughter and May and Kleinwort Benson were appointed since 1983.

Role of Kleinwort, Benson in Privatisations

Issue	*Date of sale*	*Department*	*Position*
British Petroleum[1]	1983	Treasury	Underwriter
	1987	Treasury	Underwriter
British Aerospace[1]	1985	Treasury	Joint Lead Underwriter
Cable and Wireless[1]	1983	Treasury	Adviser[3] Lead Underwriter
	1985	Treasury	Underwriter
Britoil[1]	1985	Treasury	Underwriter
Associated British Ports	1983	Transport	Adviser[3] Joint Underwriters
Enterprise Oil	1984	Energy	Adviser Underwriter
British Telecom	1984	DTI	Adviser Joint Lead Underwriter
British Gas	1986	Energy	Underwriter
British Airways	1987	Transport	Underwriter
Royal Ordnance	1987	Defence	Adviser[4]
British Steel	1988	DTI	Underwriter
Water and Sewerage Companies	1989	Environment	Underwriter
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	Energy	Adviser

[1] Sale of Government shares (not a privatisation).
[2] With Bank of England.
[3] Early stages.
[4] Initial study.

Role of Herbert Smith and Associates in Privatisations

Issue	*Date of sale*	*Department*	*Position*
Royal Ordnance	1987	Defence	Solicitor
National Seed Development Organisation	1987	DES/MAFF	Solicitor

Role of Slaughter and May in Privatisations

Issue	*Date of sale*	*Department*	*Position*
Jaguar[2]	1984	DTI	Solicitor
British Aerospace[1]	1985	Treasury	Solicitor
Britoil[1]	1985	Treasury	Solicitor
British Gas	1986	Energy	Solicitor
Unipart[2]	1987	DTI	Solicitor
British Airways	1987	Transport	Solicitor
British Petroleum[1]	1987	Treasury	Solicitor
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	Energy	Solicitor

[1] Sale of Government shares (not a privatisation).
[2] Sale of a subsidiary.

Mortgage Rates

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he has had with the Building Societies Association concerning alterations in the annual basis for altering building society mortgage rates.

Mr. Maples: None.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about how "next steps" is to be applied to the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Norman Lamont: On 25 July 1990 my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced, at columns *239-42*, his decision to introduce changes which would enable the Inland Revenue to operate fully on "next steps" lines.

I have now approved a wide-ranging action plan, prepared by the Chairman of the board of Inland Revenue. The plan sets out a programme for extensive further internal delegation and accountability within the Department and for examining ways of reshaping the structure and organisation of work. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The action plan includes launching the valuation offices for England and Wales and for Scotland as a single Executive agency on 30 September 1991, under its recently appointed chief executive-designate.

The key new feature of the plan is the establishment, within the present overall structure of the Inland Revenue, of 33 executive offices with an enhanced and more visible framework of management responsibilities and accountability. The executive offices will cover parts of the Department which have direct dealings with the public or which provide internal support services. They will include 56,800 staff, or about 85 per cent. of the Department. They will all be established by April 1992.

The executive offices will normally be in the charge of controllers who will be appointed directly by the chairman of the board of Inland Revenue. They will be given significantly increased delegated authorities to manage the financial, personnel and other resources within their charge.

Controllers will prepare framework documents, operating plans and annual reports for their offices. They will be personally accountable through their line managers to the board of Inland Revenue for how well their offices perform and for the quality of the services they provide. Framework documents, appropriate key targets and annual reports will be published.

The action plan also includes a new customer services plan, under which the Inland Revenue as a whole, and individual offices, will seek all possible means of improving the quality of service they provide to the public.

The action plan also looks forward to the longer-term possibility of other far-reaching changes in the Department's work and the way it can best be organised and managed. A number of experiments, pilot schemes and initiatives have been set up which will help to inform those decisions.

Finally, the action plan notes that a review has been considering how best the Revenue's information technology needs might be met throughout the 1990s, and subsequently. A report is currently being considered.

The Inland Revenue will remain a department headed by a chairman and board, and operating with a statutory framework which defines the tasks of the department and the relationship between the chairman and the board on the one hand and Treasury Ministers on the other.

I am confident that the implementation of this action plan will enable the Inland Revenue to operate fully on "next steps" lines, and that the changes it foreshadows will strengthen responsibility and accountability within the Department, reinforce its commitment to efficiency, value for money and services to taxpayers, and enhance the Department's ability to respond to the needs of Government, Parliament and the public.

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in Treasury income during the 1991-92 financial year resulting from restricting all tax reliefs, apart from personal allowances, to the basic rate of income tax.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The direct revenue yield is estimated to be about £1·1 billion.

Excise Duty

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the income in each year in real terms since 1980 from excise duty for *(a)* commercial vehicles and *(b)* private vehicles.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

The estimated revenue from vehicle excise duty in the United Kingdom is shown in the table, in 1989-90 prices. Due to taxation changes in October 1982, it is not possible to give a breakdown of revenue by vehicle groups on the same basis before 1983-84.

Vehicle excise duty revenue, by taxation groups, United Kingdom

	£ million 1989-90 prices		
Year	*Private and light goods, motorcycles and tricycles*	*Other taxation groups*	*Total*
1980-81	n/a	n/a	2,298
1981-82	n/a	n/a	2,495
1982-83	n/a	n/a	2,648
1983-84	2,187	556	2,744
1984-85	2,374	587	2,961
1985-86	2,428	585	3,013
1986-87	2,444	582	3,027
1987-88	2,382	577	2,959
1988-89	2,343	604	2,947
1989-90	2,329	619	2,948

ENERGY

The Gulf

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimate has been made of the effect of the destruction of 75 per cent. of Iraqi oil-refining capacity on normal international supplies after the war.

Mr. Moynihan: If losses of this magnitude were to be confirmed, the net impact on world oil markets following the cessation of hostilities would none the less be of marginal significance for the following reasons.

1. The embargo has already terminated Iraqi product exports. Amounting only to 150,000 to 200,000 barrels a day of mainly heavy fuel oil, the effect on world product markets is negligible.

2. More than adequate surplus refining capacity exists worldwide to meet any shortfall in Iraq's domestic supply —estimated before hostilities at 300,000 barrels a day.
3. Iraq's generally unsophisticated refineries produce a relatively high proportion of middle/low grade products: by contrast, any tightness which exists in world refining is at the more complex "upgrading" level.

Monktonhall Colliery

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received regarding the future of Monktonhall colliery.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have received a number of representations concerning the future of Monktonhall colliery.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the feasibility report on the future of Monktonhall colliery produced by Lothian regional council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The future of individual collieries is a matter for British Coal. I have received a copy of the feasibility report on the future of Monktonhall colliery. It will be for British Coal to take account of this when it reviews the future of the colliery in the summer.

Coal Mining Licences

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will introduce a right of appeal against refusal by British Coal of a licence to mine coal.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The licensing of coal production is a matter for the British Coal Corporation. However, I understand that a revised procedure against refusal of a licence has been agreed, which includes ultimate referral to an expert nominated by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, who will be expected to report with recommendations to the corporation. The final decision, however, must rest with British Coal, as the licensing authority.

Wave Power

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his Department has received any request from the European Commission for permission to make public correspondence between the Commission and his Department and the Energy Technology Support Units on the United Kingdom wave power programme.

Mr. Moynihan: My officials have recently been approached by officials of the European Commission requesting permission to make public correspondence between the Commission and my Department on the United Kingdom wave energy programme, which makes clear my Department's support for the inclusion of wave energy within the Community's research programme. I have no objection to the publication of such correspondence by the Commission.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Imported Food

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the procedures for the monitoring of imported food products for chemical residues and pesticides; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: An interdepartmental steering group on chemical aspects of food surveillance reviews annually the Government's programme for monitoring residues of chemicals, including pesticides, in imported and domestic food. The monitoring of pesticide residues is also reviewed annually by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides. The results of monitoring are published in a comprehensive report.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Amounts

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when farmers in west Cumbria will receive their hill livestock compensatory amounts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on 31 January, *Official Report*, column *935*.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the number of cases of BSE-affected cattle in the years ended 31 December 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1990 in Cumbria.

Mr. Maclean: The number of confirmed cases of BSE by year of onset of clinical symptoms is as follows:

Year ending	*Confirmed cases*
31 December 1986	0
31 December 1987	9
31 December 1988	52
31 December 1990	231

Salmon

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of measures to counter the dumping of Norwegian farmed salmon on the European Community.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have been asked to reply.

Allegations of the dumping of Norwegian farmed salmon on the Community market in 1989 have now been investigated by the European Commission following a formal complaint to it by the Scottish Salmon Board and the Irish Salmon Growers' Association. In its initial report to member states, the Commission stated that it had found evidence of dumping of Norwegian salmon on the Community market and resultant injury to Community producers. Although the report proposed a provisional anti-dumping duty a majority of member states opposed this proposal. The Norwegian Government subsequently indicated that measures which had been taken in 1990 to help stabilise the market would be continued into 1991 and it offered to discuss with the Commission any future

instability in the farmed salmon market. The Commission then proposed that the anti-dumping investigation should formally be terminated without remedy. This proposal has recently been put to the Council and the Government are now considering how to respond to it.

TRANSPORT

M40

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish advice for the M40 user concerning toilet facilities during *(a)* daylight hours and *(b)* night time.

Mr. Chope: There are practical difficulties about publishing the advice which my hon. Friend seeks.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider the placing of emergency Portaloo facilies midway along the M40 pending the construction and completion of permanent service facilities.

Mr. Chope: I am making inquiries about this suggestion and will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider installing appropriate temporary signposting on the M40 indicating the nearest availability of 24-hour fuel and refreshment facilities to motorway users prior to the construction of permanent motorway service facilities.

Mr. Chope: Pending the opening of planned motorway service areas, temporary signs will be erected on the M40 where there are service facilities providing 24-hour fuel and refreshments at reasonable distance from junctions with the motorway.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the distance in miles from the commencement of the southern end of the M40 to the first available service facility travelling *(a)* M40, M42, M5, *(b)* M40, M42, M6 and *(c)* M40, M42 to end.

Mr. Chope: The distances are *(a)* 104 miles *(b)* 120 miles and *(c)* 108 miles.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider installing signposting advising M40 users of the non-existence of fuel and refreshment services on that motorway at *(a)* the commencement of the M20 near Maidstone, *(b)* the commencement of the M23 at Crawley, *(c)* the commencement of the M42 (northern section)—southbound, *(d)* the M6 southbound at Hilton park and *(e)* the M5 southbound at Frankley and at other appropriate places.

Mr. Chope: Signs have been erected at both ends of the M40 and on the approaches to significant interchanges to advise users of the absence of services. Such signs on M20 and M23 would be confusing to travellers on the intervening M25. There is no evidence that such signs are necessary on M42, M6 or M5.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the M40 service facility to be open for use.

Mr. Chope: Three motorway service areas—MSAs—are planned for the M40: at Barn Hill—between junctions 12 and 13—Ardley—junction 10—and Tetsworth—between junctions 6 and 7. The selection of three sites was announced in mid-1986. Tetsworth later replaced Stokenchurch as the choice for the southern site. Planning clearance for the three sites was sought in February 1987, November 1986 and July 1989 respectively. Planning clearance has been obtained for Ardley following public inquiry. The aim is to open it before the end of 1992. Decisions on Barn Hill and Tetsworth are awaited following public inquiries.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the level of traffic flow on each link of the M40 motorway since the opening of the extension from Oxford to Birmingham.

Mr. Chope: Average 24-hour weekday traffic flows on each link of the M40, where available, since the opening of the extension from Oxford to Birmingham are listed in the table.

Junction	*Number*
1A to 2	94,000
3 to 4	78,500
6 to 7	50,000
9 to 10	48,000
11 to 12	50,000
12 to 13	46,000
13 to 14	42,000
15 to 16	48,000
16 to M42	52,000

This information is for the short period since opening. It will be some time before traffic flows settle down.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether automatic traffic counters have been installed on the recently opened extension of the M40 motorway.

Mr. Chope: Yes.

Ashford International Passenger Station

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has considered British Rail board's proposals for Ashford international passenger station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have very recently received the board's proposals and are considering them. We will announce our decision as soon as we can.

Dunstable Bypass

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest position on the preferred line of route for the A5 north-south, Dunstable bypass; when he expects the public inquiry on this bypass to commence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: We hope to announce a preferred route for the bypass this spring. The scheme will then be designed in detail in preparation for the publication of draft orders. If at this stage objections remain we would expect a public inquiry to be held in late 1992.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to introduce measures to encourage lower vehicle emission limits.

Mr. Chope: Following a decision in the EC Environment Council on 20 December 1990, strict new emissions standards will apply to all new cars from 31 December 1992. As a result petrol cars will have to be fitted with three-way catalytic convertors. We are now pressing for strict standards for gaseous and particulate emissions from heavy goods vehicles and buses, and have recommended that the Community sets a mid-1990s diesel standard based as closely as possible on the United States 1994 model year standards, both in limit values and test procedure. Later this year, we also propose to include an emissions check in the annual MOT test for all petrol driven cars and light vans.

Chelsea-Hackney Line

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken to safeguard the Chelsea-Hackney line.

Mr. Freeman: Initial safeguarding directions under the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 have been made. These came into force on 7 February 1991. London Transport will be consulting those affected. If need be, the initial direction will be amended in the light of those consultations.

Blight Notices

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the standard letter, information and booklet sent by his Department to those who may be eligible to serve a blight notice on his Department in relation to one of his Department's road schemes;

(2) what are the relevant documents that set out the practices and procedures of his Department in acquiring homes affected by his Department's road schemes under the blight notice procedure; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 4 February 1991]:* I have placed in the Library the latest versions of booklets 1, 3 and 4 in the land compensation series. These include sections on blight procedures relating to residential property, businesses and farms and are sent to all those affected by departmental road schemes once likely land acquisition requirements are publicly announced.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Willian Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been paid in each of the last five years to HIV and AIDS-related projects and to whom.

Mrs. Chalker: Our support to HIV and AIDS-related projects and programmes takes four main forms.

We have contributed £16·83 million to the World Health Organisation global programme on AIDS—GPA—since its inception in 1986 and we are the third largest donor. We have also provided £5·373 million in bilateral support to 15 national AIDS control programmes in Africa and the Caribbean, channelled through the World Health Organisation. We have also supported some 17 HIV and AIDS-related non-governmental projects through the Overseas Development Administration's joint funding scheme; the NGO projects involved are Action Aid, Care Britain, the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, Christian Aid, Caritas, ECHO—equipment for charity hospitals overseas—and Oxfam.

In addition, since 1987-88 we have provided direct financial support for 10 research projects related to HIV and AIDS in developing countries; these are managed by United Kingdom-based academic and research institutions. The institutions involved are the Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group, the Imperial College of Science and Technology London, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Medical Research Council, the Programme for Appropriate Technologies in Health, the university of East Anglia, the university of Swansea and the university of Sussex.

The amounts spent are as follows:

HIV and AIDS-related assistance
1986-87 to 1990-91

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*Total*
Global programme on AIDS	250,000	5,250,000	2,250,000	4,540,000	4,540,000	16,830,000
National AIDS control programmes	—	1,152,000	608,000	2,175,000	1,438,000	5,373,000
Research projects	—	82,430	297,990	470,660	890,760	1,741,840
NGO projects	—	8,670	110,190	140,090	239,180	498,130

Horn of Africa

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Minister for Overseas Development will publish in the *Official Report* the letters she has written to the major British non-governmental organisations on famine in the horn of Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: I have today written the following letter to the Directors of Christian Aid, Oxfam, CAFOD, Save the Children Fund and CARE:

You and the Directors of Oxfam and CAFOD have written a number of letters to me recently about famine in Africa and particularly our emergency relief operations in Ethiopia and Sudan. As your letters all raise similar points I will respond to you all in one letter.

I am surprised by your reaction of the Government's response to the threat of renewed famine in the Horn of Africa. Because of many improvements to early-warning and delivery systems since 1984, Government and NGOs are all much better prepared than we were then to cope with this problem. National, international and British relief agencies working in Ethiopia and Sudan have established sound field-reporting systems. My regular meetings with the NGOs

have been particularly helpful in the planning of our famine relief operations. As a result, the latest threat of famine has not taken us by surprise.

Britain has taken a leading role in the famine relief effort. Our response has been swift and substantial. When the early warning signs first appeared last autumn, I announced immediate assistance. As soon as we received the FAO reports of serious crop failures in 1990 and impending food shortages in 1991, I announced further assistance. In the few weeks since my announcement on 19 December, Britain has committed £17·75 million in new emergency assistance for Ethiopia and Sudan. Over the last two years the total figure of £76 million —hardly the ungenerous response you have stated. It is certainly not the view in Addis, as was evident during my recent visit, that the British Government has forgotten the Horn of Africa.

Britain will be providing more assistance in the remaining eleven months of 1991. As part of the £17·75 million new assistance I have just pledged 20,000 tonnes of new food aid for Sudan, some of which, I hope, will be channelled through British NGOs. The £2 million non-food aid element in the £8·75 million package for Ethiopia I announced on 29 January is also being allocated through your agencies. These new allocations will enable us to meet some of the NGO's outstanding requests particularly, for help with transport. In doing so we shall take account of changing needs in the countries themselves. For example, the opening of Massawa port offers the possibility of a more cost-effective relief route for food to Eritrea. If the capacity of the port is stepped up, we shall need to look carefully at the balance of our support for the three main Ethiopian relief channels; the Southern Line; cross-border assistance; and the Massawa route.

But Britain alone cannot solve the Horn's problems. Nor can we hope to fund every request British NGOs put to us. It is inevitable that some requests will not be met in full. It is also the case that some requests were, in our judgement, not best suited to meet priority requirements on the ground. Other requests required more detailed work before they could be considered further. While we must make emergency assistance available swiftly, we must also ensure that it is used effectively. NGOs, through whom we channel so much of this assistance, share this responsibility.

We are now considering urgently the allocation of the additional funds I have recently announced. My officials will continue to work closely with yours and take into account all the concerns you have raised with me. I leave for Mozambique and South Africa on Friday. I shall be pleased to meet with you and your colleagues on my return when I will be able to talk to you about the needs in Southern Africa as well as the Horn.

I am copying this letter to Frank Judd and to Julian Filochowski. I am also sending a copy for information to Nick Hinton of Save the Children Fund and Julian Hopkins of CARE.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Loans

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was *(a)* the cost of producing, *(b)* the cost of distribution and *(c)* the numbers produced of his Departments leaflet "Loans for Students, a brief guide 1990-91 in England and Wales".

Mr. Alan Howarth: "Loans for Students" is a 15-page booklet produced by the Department of Education and Science and the Scottish Office Education Department. A total of 650,000 copies were printed for England and Wales at a cost of £47,821. The initial distribution of 200,000 copies to higher and further education institutions, to LEAs and, through them, to schools and colleges, cost £7,557.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many of the loan applications reported by the Student Loans Company are repeat applications arising from errors in the submission of applications.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Student Loans Company is responsible for the administration of the scheme. I am therefore asking the managing director of the company to write direct to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Student Grants

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average student grant in London.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information is not available in the form requested.

For the current academic year, the rates of maintenance grant under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1990 are £2,845 for students living away from the parental home and studying in London and £1,795 for those at home. Additional allowances may also be payable, but all maintenance payments are means tested. Tuition fees are also payable.

In addition, student loans are now available for most full-time courses of one year or more of a standard higher than A-level but below postgraduate level. The rates for London are:

(a) if the year is the final year of the course, £240 if the student resides at his parents' home, and £340 if he does not; and

(b) if the year is any other year of the course, £330 if the student resides at his parents' home, and £460 if he does not.

LEA Budgets

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make available in the Library, copies of all section 42 statements provided by local education authorities.

Mr. Fallon: Local education authorities' section 42 budget statements are typically very bulky documents, running in some cases to several hundred pages each. I am arranging for part 1 of each published statement to be placed in the Library. Part 1 gives details of the resources an authority is retaining for central management instead of passing down to schools for them to spend.

Nuclear Physics

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the proportion of Science and Engineering Research Council's funding for nuclear physics which was not related to contributions to CERN or support for British scientists in their work at CERN in each of the last five years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is as follows:

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	£ million 1989-90
(a) SERC net expenditure for nuclear physics	63·2	69·0	82·2	85·9	76·4
(b) Expenditure not related to CERN	12·6	11·4	13·7	16·7	17·1
(c) Percentage	20·0	16·5	16·7	20·1	22·4

PRIME MINISTER

Devolved Powers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals Her Majesty's Government have for devolving powers or functions currently exercised by central Government to local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The current review of local government encompasses issues of finance, structure and the functions of local authorities. The Government will announce the outcome of the review as soon as they are in a position to do so.

Research and Development

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all programmes approved by the European Community under the framework programme for research and development stating in each case the sums spent in the United Kingdom as a percentage of the total, and giving the equivalent figures for *(a)* France, *(b)* the German Federal Republic and *(c)* Italy.

The Prime Minister: Information is not available in the form requested. The third framework programme provides for 15 specific programmes on which negotiations are still proceeding. They are expected to be adopted by the Council of Ministers later this year. For the most part, funds will then be allocated to research projects by competitive tender.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with the president of the International Red Cross.

Efficiency Scrutinies

Mr. Forman: To ask the Prime Minister what is his latest estimate of total cumulative savings from the Rayner scrutinies and succeeding efficiency scrutiny arrangements.

The Prime Minister: The latest estimate of the cumulative total of savings agreed by Departments following efficiency scrutinies since 1979 is £1·5 billion.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Signal Life Assurance Co. Ltd.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he released the inspectors' report on Signal Life Assurance Co. Ltd. to any organisations.

Mr. Redwood: It would be inappropriate for me to discuss details of individual unpublished reports. Such reports, which include that into the affairs of Signal Life Assurance Co. Limited, are disclosed where appropriate under the Companies Act 1948, as amended, under part XIV of the Companies Act 1985, as amended, and under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Export Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the work of the export control organisation in his Department over the past two years.

Mr. Sainsbury: In 1989 and 1990 the export control organisation of my Department issued 75,925 and 45,897 licences respectively. We are continually seeking new ways to try and minimise the burden of export controls to exporters while improving their effectiveness and the reduction in the number of licences issued in 1990 as a result of one of these changes. The introduction during 1989 and 1990 of open general export licences eliminated the need for exporters of certain equipment to certain destinations to obtain licences from DTI and allows the export control organisation to use its resources more effectively.

Shareholders' Rights

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether in the light of the judgment in the second Caparo case, he has any plans to review shareholders' rights against auditors.

Mr. Redwood: No.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Diocesan Land

Mr. Redmond: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list for each diocese covering the three counties of Yorkshire, how much land has been sold in each of the latest four available years; and how much was raised by the sales.

Mr. Alison: The three counties of Yorkshire include all or a large part of the dioceses of Bradford, Ripon, Sheffield, Wakefield and York and very small parts of the dioceses of Derby, Durham and Southwell.

In the last four years the Commissioners have sold the following land, all in North Yorkshire and the dioceses of Ripon and York:

Year	Acreage	Net sale proceeds £000's
1987	167	460
1988	460	736
1989	217	1,036
1990	55	400

Over the same period the dioceses of Bradford, Ripon, Sheffield, Wakefield and York have sold the following amounts of diocesan glebe:

Year	Acreage	Sale proceeds £000's
1987	29	501
1988	34	352
1989	21	266
1990	3	176

These figures may include some diocesan glebe outside the three counties of Yorkshire.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out in the *Official Report* the main points of his speech of 2 February on his plan for peace in the middle east after hostilities have ended in the Gulf.

Mr. Hurd: I am arranging for a copy of my speech of 2 February to be placed in the Library of the House.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 and 5 February.

Mr. Hurd: A meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council took place in Brussels on 4 February. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council heard a progress report from the Commission on the GATT Uruguay round. It called on the Commission to pursue multilaterally and bilaterally whatever action is necessary to achieve agreement.

Ministers agreed in principle on financial assistance for Israel, together with a symmetrical package for the Palestinians in the occupied territories. No figures have been agreed.

Ministers welcomed the decision to hold referenda in the Baltic states and expressed the hope that this would encourage dialogue with the central authorities of the USSR. No new decisions were taken on EC aid for the Soviet Union or on food and medical aid for Romania and Bulgaria.

On South Africa, Ministers welcomed President de Klerk's speech on 1 February in which he announced a programme of further political reforms. They reconfirmed their intention to ease the EC measures adopted in 1986 once legislative action is taken to repeal the Group Areas Act and the Land Acts.

The second ministerial meeting of the inter-governmental conference on political union, also held on 4 February, discussed ideas for a common foreign and security policy. No decisions were taken, and discussions will continue.

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the People's Republic of China voted on Security Council resolution 678.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The People's Republic of China abstained on Security Council resolution 678.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department was represented at the conference on Iraq in the 1990s held at Chatham House, London in 1990; and what financial or logistical support was given to the conference by his Department.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Foreign Office officials attended the conference but we gave it no financial or logistical support.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those nuclear facilities in Iraq registered with the International Atomic Energy Agency for international inspection; and what other nuclear facilities there are in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on 4 February, at column *69*. Apart from the Tuwaitha research centre, there are no declared nuclear facilities in Iraq.

DEFENCE

Gulf Crisis

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *547*, on the Gulf crisis, how much of the operating costs incurred up to 16 January in Operation Granby is expenditure which would not have been incurred anyway.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In excess of £700 million of the full operating costs up to 16 January would not otherwise have been incurred.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *547*, on the Gulf crisis, how much of the costs incurred up to 16 January in Operation Granby, is replacement costs of equipment where payment will be made outside the current financial year; and when he estimates that these payments will be made.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None of the costs incurred up to 16 January related to equipment replacement costs.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the daily cost of British involvement in the Gulf crisis and *(b)* the daily cost, excluding the costs of salaries, equipment replacement and other relevant expenditure which was already committed before the crisis began.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The latest estimate of the full operating costs that fall to the Ministry of Defence to date

and in the financial year 1990-91 is over £1 billion and over £1·25 billion respectively. The proportion which is additional to costs already committed before the crisis began is about three quarters and two thirds respectively. The proportion of costs reduces because the greater part of the additional costs was equipment which was committed before hostilities started.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the total cost of British involvement in the Gulf crisis and *(b)* the proportion of that total which is additional to costs already committed before the crisis began (i) to date and (ii) in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The full daily operating cost to the Ministry of Defence of British involvement in the Gulf crisis is estimated to be over £4 million per day. The daily cost including expenditure committed before the crisis began is estimated to be about £1·5 million per day.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what date he was first made aware of Iraq's possession, or steps to get possession, of a 350mm gun of which component parts were made by United Kingdom firms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence first became aware of Iraq's attempts to obtain components for a very large calibre gun from United Kingdom firms in April 1990.

Supergun

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Iraq has any functioning supergun.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We do not comment on such matters.

Defence Equipment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 25 January, *Official Report*, column *359*, if he will list those categories of defence equipment which are classified as lethal.

Mr. Alan Clark: No such list is maintained. All export licence applications for military equipment are considered separately on individual merit. The definition of lethality given to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 2 May 1990 at column *602* is sufficient for the purpose.

Low Flying

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the list of countries whose nationals have received pilot training in low-flying exercises over Britain during the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The United Kingdom low-flying system is primarily reserved for low-flying training by British military and United Kingdom-based United States air force aircraft. Low flying by other aircraft accounts for less than 2 per cent. of total low flying in the United Kingdom and is normally associated with exercises or exchange programmes where there is reciprocal benefit to the United Kingdom. Some pilot training courses, in which foreign nationals may participate, also contain an element of low-flying training. Records are not, however, maintained in a format that would enable the information sought to be provided without disproportionate cost and effort.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Support

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the ratio, in 1989-90, between public support for local authority housing and for housing provided by housing associations; and what was the position five years ago.

Mr. Yeo: The ratio between local authority and Housing Corporation capital expenditure on housing was 3·5:1 in 1985-86 and 4·2:1 in 1989-90 when measured in gross terms; or 2·3:1 and 1·6:1 respectively when measured in net terms. The gross figures reflect the surge in expenditure financed from receipts by authorities in 1989-90. In both years some of the local authority expenditure would have been on housing association schemes. Housing associations and local authorities also receive revenue subsidies.

The Gulf

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate has been made of the environmental damage caused by the bombing of Iraq's chemical and nuclear installations.

Mr. Trippier: With regard to nuclear installations I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) at column *504*. With regard to chemical installations, meaningful assessments will only be possible once peace has returned to the area.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with Dr. Abdullah Toukan, chief scientific adviser to King Hussein of Jordan, concerning the environmental effects of hostilities in the Gulf.

Mr. Heseltine: None.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessments he has commissioned of the environmental damage caused by the oil slicks in the Gulf; what assessments have been undertaken by international organisations; and what actions are being taken to protect the future ecology of the Gulf.

Mr. Heseltine: I have commissioned an urgent report from the Natural Environment Research Council including an assessment of the biological effects of the released oil. This study is complete and has been made available to Gulf states. I have also seen an assessment by the World Conservation Monitoring Service, and the United Nations Environment Programme has announced its intention to send a team of experts to carry out an independent and objective assessment of environmental damage in the Gulf.

I understand that Government agencies in Saudi Arabia, assisted by a United Kingdom expert from the

marine pollution control unit of the Department of Transport, are now determining priorities for protecting the most significant environmental sites.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what steps he is taking to protect from pollution the coral islands of Qaruh, Umm Al Maradim and Kubbar;

(2) what response he has made to the representations on protection of coral by Dr. Nigel Downing on islands in Kuwaiti waters.

Mr. Heseltine: These islands are Kuwaiti territory and in the case of Qaruh and Umm al Maradim have recently been liberated by allied forces from Iraqi occupation. While they remain in the war zone, the scope for pollution control action is likely to be extremely limited. We have received representations from Dr. Nigel Downing on the ecological importance, particularly for coral, of these islands, which are confirmed by other assessments available to us; and we are making these available to authorities in the Gulf.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a breakdown on housing in the LDCC area since its inception, by housing tenure.

Mr. Portillo: This information is given in the table, based on the 1981 census and a recent LDDC survey:

Houshold tenure	*Total at 1981*	*Per cent.*	*Total at 1990*	*Per cent.*
Owner-Occupier	780	5	8,970	35
Shared Ownership	—	—	330	1·5
Rented from:				
Local authority	12,200	83	11,280	44
Housing associations	740	5	2,130	8
Rented with, for example, job, shop	980	7	320	1·5
Private Landlord				
Furnished			1,690	7
Unfurnished			600	2
Other/Not answered			260	1
Totals	14,700	100	25,580	100

Planning Appeals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the planning legislation to prevent companies that have gone into receivership from appealing against refusals of planning consent.

Mr. Yeo: None. Since companies in receivership may continue to do business, I see no reason why they should not submit planning applications or appeals.

Derelict Land Grant

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amount of derelict land grant paid to each local authority in Staffordshire since 1987-88.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is as follows:

Derelict land grant paid to local authorities in Staffordshire

Local authority	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91*[1] £
Cannock Chase	246,276	412,359	400,991	280,030
East Staffordshire	—	—	—	—
Lichfield	262,500	388,829	54,976	3,357
Newcastle-under-Lyme	49,196	12,831	87,569	1,235,916
Stafford	—	—	—	—
South Staffordshire	28,014	55,806	64,534	6,074
Staffordshire Moorlands	5,943	—	9,052	—
Stoke-on-Trent	297,339	1,042,517	701,018	185,126
Tamworth	94,361	1,645	12,029	—
Staffordshire CC.	642,383	895,212	207,020	234,354

[1] Payments to date.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of all those local authorities who *(a)* have provided exemption from the poll tax for Gulf personnel together with the numbers involved in each authority and the income forgone and *(b)* have not provided exemption; and if he will make a astatement.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 5 February, *Official Report*, column *108*.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will detail how discussions on BATNEEC and best practicable environmental option specific to the burning of refuse-derived fuel will be conducted.

Mr. Baldry: The refuse-derived fuel industry and other interested parties will be invited to participate in the discussions on the production of guidance on the best available techniques not entailing excessive costs—BATNEEC—and best practicable environmental option—BPEO—for the burning of refuse-derived fuel. The precise mechanism for conducting the production of guidance is currently being finalised and the mechanism will be included in general guidance on integrated pollution control to be published by the Department shortly.

Pollution Measurement

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when Her Majesty's Government expect the full implementation of the common method of measuring pollution agreed at the OECD meeting on Wednesday 30 January.

Mr. Baldry: At the meeting of OECD Environment Ministers held in Paris on 30-31 January, all OECD member countries agreed that improvements in the coverage and reliability of environmental information need to be speeded up over the next decade. The Government fully endorse this OECD initiative and the United Kingdom will continue to be active, with our OECD colleagues, in attempting to reach this goal. Indeed, the Government have been a leading advocate in establishing the European Environment Agency to improve information and its comparability between Community countries.

Global Warming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proposals have been put forward by the United Kingdom delegation to the international conference on global warming held in Virginia in February 1991; how the United Kingdom has been represented at this conference; and what assistance has been afforded to non-governmental organisations to attend the conference as observers;

(2) what resources were offered by the United Kingdom to support the administrative secretariat of the inter-governmental global warming conference held in Virginia, USA in February.

Mr. Baldry: Officials from my Department and others are attending the first negotiating session in Virginia of the intergovernmental negotiating committee for a framework convention on climate change. At the session, officials have announced the United Kingdom's intention to provide £85,000 to support the secretariat for the negotiations and the attendance of developing countries at this and further negotiating sessions. NGOs are attending this session and the United Kingdom has supported rules of procedure which secure their presence at further sessions.

London Zoo

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department intends to make available sufficient funding to ensure the future of London zoo at Regent's park.

Mr. Trippier: On 8 November 1988, the then Secretary of State for the Environment announced that the Government had paid £10 million to the Zoological Society of London. He said that with this support and other steps it was taking the society was in a position to secure the future of its zoos without further public subsidy.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will make additional funds available for the construction of new indoor exhibition facilities at London zoo.

Mr. Trippier: On 8 November 1988, the then Secretary of State for the Environment when announcing a payment of £10 million to the Zoological Society of London said that the Government's financial commitment to the zoos was at an end. That remains the position.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give his Department's latest estimate of the cost of full remedial work required to make good the arrears of maintenance at London zoo.

Mr. Trippier: I am getting expert advice on this.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department expects to make available to the Zoological Society of London the additional 10 acres of ground promised to the zoo in 1988.

Mr. Trippier: The offer remains on the table if and when the society demonstrates it needs the extra land and comes forward with an acceptable scheme.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to provide additional car parking facilities close to London zoo and more convenient forms of public transport to the zoo.

Mr. Trippier: None.

Zoos

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to implement the government-funded Peat Marwick McLintock report on the work of the Zoological Society of London and of its zoos at Regent's park and Whipsnade.

Mr. Trippier: The report was drawn upon by the Zoological Society of London and its subsidiary in the preparation of their development strategy in 1988. This strategy is theirs to implement or depart from as they judge best.

Environment Meeting (Paris)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the special meeting on the environment held at the end of January at the OECD in Paris.

Mr. Heseltine: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting.

The meeting of the OECD Environment Committee at ministerial level on 30 and 31 January 1991 was the fourth occasion on which Environment Ministers had met in this forum since 1970.

Ministers discussed the international community's response to the Gulf oil spill and called for a strengthening of the international capacity to prevent and confront future environmental disasters. This would involve the strengthening of international principles and agreements, the reinforcement of technological and institutional response capacities as well as the possible establishment of liability verification and claims settlement procedures, in co-operation with the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Maritime Organisation and other relevant international organisations. Ministers called for early and full implementation of the IMO convention on oil pollution preparedness response and co-operation and for urgent work to develop a register of information on technological and institutional response capacities.

The United Kingdom worked actively to secure agreement on a new OECD act on the reduction of transfrontier movements of wastes. This act, approved with a USA reservation, will require OECD countries to work towards self-sufficiency in disposing of wastes within their own territories and to co-operate in further limiting international traffic in wastes.

The United Kingdom supported four other OECD acts approved by Ministers. These covered further OECD work on environmental information and indicators, a guide to integrated pollution prevention and control policies, recommendations on the use of economic instruments in environmental policy, and an agreement between OECD member countries to share responsibility for investigating and dealing with the risks posed by existing chemicals to human health and the environment.

Ministers welcomed OECD's latest state of the environment report and its preliminary set of environmental indicators. We approved a forward-looking communiqué endorsing a large number of initiatives intended to develop closer policy integration and improved environmental performance both at the national level and within the OECD region. Particular attention was paid to the need for better integration of environmental and economic decision-making. Our communiqué also stressed the need for strengthened international co-operation, particularly with the countries of eastern and central Europe and with developing countries.

I am placing in the Library copies of the ministerial communiqué, the ministerial statement on the environmental situation in the Gulf and the text of the five OECD acts approved by Ministers.

OECD Environment Report

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the recent OECD report on the state of the environment.

Mr. Heseltine: I warmly welcome the publication by the OECD of this its third report on the state of the environment. It is a major report, assessing the progress of environmental policies in OECD countries over the last two decades and the problems to be addressed in the 1990s. The Government fully endorse the conclusions of the report notably that the pace of progress to improve the environment needs to be speeded up, better integration between economic and environmental policies is required, and that work on improving environmental information needs to be accelerated.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many mortgage repossessions there have been in *(a)* the city and *(b)* the county of Leicester during each of the last 12 months for which records are available; and what were the annual figures for each of the last 12 years.

Mr. Yeo: Comprehensive information on mortgage possessions in the city and county of Leicester, including properties surrendered without a court order, is not available.

The available figures for possession orders made by the courts covering the county of Leicester, not all of which are executed, are as follows:

Mortgage possession orders

	Number
1987	295
1988	455
1989	548
1990	694

Derelict Land Programme

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources are being made available under the derelict land programme in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The resources available in 1991-92 for derelict land reclamation under the derelict land programme will be £87·918 million. This represents an increase of 23 per cent. on this year's provision.

Derelict land reclamation has an important part to play in safeguarding and improving the environment through the return of previously developed land to beneficial use. Derelict land grant has made a substantial contribution to this process. Since 1979 it has funded the reclamation of more than 14,450 hectares of derelict land and I expect that schemes producing an additional 1,250 hectares of reclaimed land will be completed in this financial year. The resources available for 1991-92 will allow faster progress to be made in recycling land and will, at the same time, allow schemes for environmental improvement and clearing up badly contaminated land to be carried forward. They will be enough to support the reclamation of a further 1,300 hectares of derelict land.

Every region will receive more DLG resources than in 1990-91, but, as in previous years, more than 90 per cent. of the resources will be allocated to the north and midlands where the problems of dereliction are most severe. I have given the largest allocations to the north west and Yorkshire and Humberside where some of the most extensive dereliction is found; and to the west midlands where there is a need to continue support for the programme of investigative and remedial work on old limestone workings in the black country.

I am approving new rolling programmes of reclamation for the Weaver Valley in Cheshire; Kirklees; the north Derbyshire coalfield; and The Wrekin. Following the second round of triennial rolling programme reviews carried out last year, I have decided to continue rolling programme status for Project Furness in Barrow, and Liverpool. The Leeds and Liverpool canal corridor rolling programme will be reviewed in the course of 1991. The total provision made for the 21 rolling programmes approved for 1991-92 will be nearly £36 million. Derelict land grant remains an important instrument for the regeneration of the inner cities. About 40 per cent. of derelict land grant resources is devoted annually towards reclamation in these areas and this level of support will continue in 1991-92. Twelve of the 21 rolling programmes of reclamation are located in inner city areas: the total 1991-92 expenditure on these programmes is estimated at more than £21 million.

Overall, my allocations include more than £19 million for treating dereliction arising from coal mining. In the last five years the Government have steadily increased its support for reclamation schemes in coalfield areas. The resources allocated to coalfield reclamation in 1991-92 are,

at £19·515 million, more than £6 million for new starts in the northern, Yorkshire and Humberside, west midlands and east midlands areas.

The allocations will allow regions to approve at least 25 new schemes where the treatment of contamination has been a decisive factor in derelict land grant support being given. The total cost of reclaiming the 230 hectares involved will be about £24 million of which about £5 million will be spent next year. I estimate that between £10 million and £15 million will be spent next year on schemes to treat seriously contaminated derelict land. This is a new objective for the programme made in response to the Select Committee on the Environment's report "Contaminated Land" published on 24 January 1990.

The increased resources for the derelict land programme are being made available at the same time as new priorities and objectives for derelict land grant are being considered. We want to enhance the role of derelict land grant as a nationwide grant regime for the reclamation of derelict land wherever it has a damaging effect on the environment. Our aim is to bring the land back into the most appropriate use for the benefit of the local community.

These changes will be set out in detail in a derelict land grant advice note to be published later this year.

WALES

St. David's

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to visit St. David's; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no present plans to visit St. David's.

Commissioner for Local Administration

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the ranking of the Office of Commissioner for Local Administration for Wales in equivalent civil service grades since its inception.

Mr. David Hunt: The commissioner is paid at the level of civil service grade 2 officer, plus a £500 lead.

Neath/Port Talbot Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he now expects a decision to be made on the new general hospital for Neath/Port Talbot; and what change in time tabling has taken place there since 13 September 1989.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The recently submitted business plan for the proposed new hospital has been the subject of discussion with the district health authority. This is now being examined and a decision will be announced in due course. At this stage no change has been made to the timetable, which will be for review by the health authority.

Litter

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes extra cash for Welsh district councils concerning the anti-litter legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The local government finance settlement for 1991-92 which the House approved on 29 January provides sufficient resources to enable local authorities to maintain and where necessary develop the services they provide including those relating to litter which arise from part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Hospitals

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number and locations of the hospitals he has visited in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend visited the following hospitals in Wales since 4 May 1990: Llandough hospital, Cardiff; Chirk community hospital; and Montgomery county infirmary, Newtown and he intends to visit other hospitals and health facilities in Wales over the coming months.

Royal College of Nursing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to meet the Royal College of Nursing, Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend last met representatives of the Welsh board of the Royal College of Nursing on 26 November 1990. He has no immediate plans to meet with them again, but, as Minister with responsibility for health, I am looking forward to a meeting with them in the not-too-distant future.

Heads of the Valleys Roads

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what improvements he has made to the heads of the valleys roads.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 1980 the B4276 junction with the A465 at Baverstocks hotel has been improved and there have been a number of other improvements to bring certain sections of the A465 up to current standards.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to improve the heads of the valleys roads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Proposals for improvement to the heads of the valleys section of the A465 will be decided on in the context of the south Wales area traffic study report, which is under consideration. Improvement of the Glynneath-Aberdulais section of the A465 is already included in the roads programme.

Road Communications

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning road communications between north and south Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government's policy is to upgrade the A483 and A470 routes by means of selective improvements. Details of the schemes planned to achieve this are set out in "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s". Revised information on these schemes will be set out in a supplement to "Roads in Wales" to be published shortly.

Valleys Programme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to provide extra money for the valleys programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: About £800 million of public money will be spent under the valleys programme over the five years to March 1993. I will continue to take account of the needs of the valleys in making my spending decisions.

Valley Roads

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will initiate a programme to enable the county authorities of valley communities to repair and to build roads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Repair and improvements to local roads are matters for the county councils as the responsible highway authorities. Resources are provided by unhypothicated credit approvals allocated by a formula agreed with the local authority associations, use of capital receipts, contributions from revenue and transport and revenue support grants.

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much capital was realised by each of the local authorities in Wales in 1990 by the sale of council homes.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not yet available.

Local Authority Asset Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to increase the percentage of the moneys raised by the sale of *(a)* council homes and *(b)* other assets that local authorities in Wales are allowed to use.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We have no plans to do so.

"Agenda for Action"

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount of the increased administration revenue funding, directed towards family practitioner committees and family health service authorities, referred to as objective 9, of the Welsh Office NHS directorate "Agenda for Action".

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Family practitioner committee —since 17 September 1990, family health services authority—administration revenue funding in Wales has increased from £3,420,000 in 1988-89 to £6,333,000 in 1990-91. This is a cash increase of 85 per cent. and a real-terms increase of 61 per cent.

This increase in funding reflects our commitment to strengthen the management capabilities of these authorities, in line with the expanded role envisaged for them in our White Papers, "Promoting Better Health" and "Working for Patients".

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what voluntary, private and other resources, referred to in objective 5, of the Welsh Office NHS directorate "Agenda for Action", have so far been identified to enhance the cost effectiveness or quality of the service, or to generate funds; by how much the effectiveness has so far been improved and the quality of service improved; and what funds have been generated.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The corporate management programme for the NHS in Wales published in 1988 placed clear responsibility for pursuit of this objective on district health authorities and family practitioner committees—now Family Health Services Authorities. As the "Agenda for Action" makes clear, the NHS in Wales continues to attach considerable importance to the benefits, in terms of health gain as well as cost improvements, which can result from developing inter-agency partnerships in health care.

Voluntary organisations are fully involved with health and social services authorities in the county joint planning mechanisms concerned with the development of new patterns of service for people suffering from mental illnesses or with a mental handicap. In addition circular WHC(90)55, a copy of which is in the Library, requested authorities to prepare local strategies for health and required them to involve voluntary and other groups in this process.

Information on the impact achieved at a local level by this objective is not held centrally, with the exception of income generation activity; this resulted in £983,000 new income being made available to the NHS in Wales in the two-year period 1988-89 to 1989-90.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what savings, by district health authority in Wales, have resulted from 1989 to 1991, from the review of energy targets listed as objective 24 in the Welsh Office NHS directorate "Agenda for Action"; and what are the estimated projected savings, by district health authority, for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Welsh Office energy efficiency monitoring and targeting exercise relates to a base year of 1984-85. Since that time, cumulative savings from enhanced efficiency have been achieved by the district health authorities in Wales as follows:

	Approximate £ million[1]
By 1988-89	4·00
By 1989-90	6·25
Expectation for 1990-91	8·75
Target for 1991-92	12·00
Estimated projected savings by 1992-93	15·50

[1] Hospitals only, excluding savings arising from reduced fuel prices since 1985 and from the effects of combined heat and power schemes.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what additional costs will arise from the establishment and administration of the all Wales manpower strategy referred to in objective 18, of the Welsh Office NHS directorate, "Agenda for Action";

(2) what is the budgeted cost, per district authority, of the establishment and administration of the all Wales training programme, referred to in objective 20 of the Welsh Office NHS directorate "Agenda for Action" in 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The objectives referred to were contained in the corporate management programme

published in 1988 and which has been superseded by "Agenda for Action". Objective 18 referred to the implementation and development of the manpower strategy published in 1987 which has been undertaken under the auspices of a manpower steering group established by the Department. The strategy outlined a comprehensive and coherent approach to manpower issues in the NHS in Wales at both all Wales and local levels. To a large extent the implementation of the strategy has brought together a number of existing initiatives as well as initiating new developments. A key element has been the integration of manpower issues into the ongoing management process of the NHS. It is not realistic, therefore, to identify separately the costs of the strategy from the mainstream costs of the service. As indicated in "Agenda for Action", it is now intended to update the strategy in the light of developments since its publication.

The all Wales training programme referred to in objective 20 has been pursued by the training and development group (sub-group of MSG), and has been funded by district health authorities pro-rata to the recurrent element of their discretionary allocations. Its projected outturn for 1990-91 and budget for 1991-92 are £1,091,000 and £1,320,000 respectively. On a pro-rata basis the distribution by district health authority would be:

	1990-91 £	*1991-92* £
Clwyd	136,375	167,640
East Dyfed	87,280	116,160
Gwent	162,559	203,280
Gwynedd	81,825	106,920
Mid Glamorgan	189,834	260,040
Powys	39,276	55,440
South Glamorgan	220,382	186,120
West Glamorgan	140,739	172,920
Pembrokeshire	32,730	51,480

The future of the training and development group and the all Wales training programme and its funding, are under review in the light of revised arrangements to be implemented at the all Wales level for manpower planning, training and education.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recommendations have emerged from objective 8, of the Welsh Office NHS directorate "Agenda for Action", in relation to the integration of hospitals, community and primary care teams and the contribution of local authority social services in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A key theme of "Agenda for Action" is the need for a wide range of organisations to work together to improve the health of the people of Wales. To this end, district health authorities and family health services authorities have been asked to develop, with social services departments and other agencies, joint local strategies for health.

Local strategies will provide the appropriate framework for ensuring the substantial resources available to the NHS are deployed to best effect.

NHS (Technology)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what systems to facilitate medical audit and monitor service quality are being considered by the Welsh Office as part of its information and information technology strategy for the NHS in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Systems for both medical audit and for monitoring service quality have been indentified as priority developments in the "Technical Strategy and Implementation Programme" published in December 1990. Systems for the former will be provided shortly; the latter will form part of a health status and performance monitoring system which is currently under consideration.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what finances he intends to make available to local authorities in Wales to enable them to provide the secure accommodation necessary to meet court requirements under the Home Secretary's proposals on the remand of alleged juvenile offenders.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The proposals are being taken into account in our review of secure care. I expect to receive the final report of the review team within the next few weeks and then we shall consult Welsh local authorities about it.

Flood Damage

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce a policy of full compensation for grants of up to 100 per cent. to local authorities to pay for emergency remedial work on properties damaged by flooding or other natural disasters.

Mr. David Hunt: It is not my intention to introduce a policy of full compensation grants, since perfectly adequate arrangements already exist. It is for local authorities to secure the appropriate level of insurance cover towards the cost of remedial work on property damaged by flooding or other natural disasters. The Bellwin scheme of assistance provides 85 per cent. support for eligible costs incurred by local authorities in dealing with emergencies. In emergencies, such as those faced by Towyn last year, where circumstances are exceptionally severe, the Government stand ready to consider additional assistance over and above that normally available.

Press Releases

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that his Department's press releases are sent to the Library at the same time that they are made available to the media.

Mr. David Hunt: It is not always practicable but, where it is, I shall.

Community Charge

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the total cost of the transitional relief for community charge payers for each Welsh district council area and the average cost per head in each of the Welsh districts.

Mr. David Hunt: The amount of relief distributed to each district council area and the average cost per personal charge payer are shown in the following table. The scheme is fully financed by the Government.

Relief 1990-91 and 1991-92

	Amount of relief to be distributed			
	1990-91		*1991-92*	
	£000	*£ per head*[1]	*£000*	*£ per head*[1]
Alyn and Deeside	0	0	938	17
Colwyn	39	1	425	10
Delyn	13	0	993	20
Glyndwr	83	2	1,855	58
Rhuddlan	6	0	1,281	29
Wrexham Maelor	141	2	4,185	46
Carmarthen	488	11	1,219	29
Ceredigion	500	10	800	17
Dinwfwr	357	12	1,051	36
Llanelli	625	11	1,797	31
Preseli Pembrokeshire	378	7	946	18
South Pembrokeshire	121	4	307	10
Blaenau Gwent	1,847	31	3,648	62
Islwyn	665	13	2,074	42
Monmouth	0	0	31	1
Newport	46	0	1,116	11
Torfaen	199	3	1,301	19
Aberconwy	28	1	215	5
Arfon	147	4	1,059	26
Dwyfor	18	1	529	25
Meirionnydd	269	9	624	25
Ynys Mon	4	0	1,345	27
Cynon Valley	1,571	31	3,154	64
Merthyr Tydfil	873	20	1,639	37
Ogwr	3,163	30	5,197	50
Rhondda	2,442	40	4,904	82
Rhymney Valley	1,455	19	2,852	37
Taff Ely	95	1	1,570	22
Brecknock	41	1	508	16
Montgomeryshire	5	0	284	7
Radnorshire	3	0	104	6
Cardiff	93	0	4,900	23
Vale of Glamorgan	4	0	160	2
Lliw Valley	1,072	23	2,069	44
Neath	1,205	24	2,046	41
Port Talbot	943	24	1,729	44
Swansea	1,059	8	3,142	23
Wales	20,000	9	62,000	29

[1] £ per personal chargepayer.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Detection

12. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to improve the overall crime detection rate.

Mr. John Patten: The most recent figures available for 1989 show that the crime detection rate for the most serious offences, including violence against the person and sexual offences, remains high at around 75 per cent. I believe that it is important that chief officers should target their efforts on serious and other crimes of particular concern to the public, although they must decide their own priorities in the light of local circumstances. But crime cannot be dealt with by the police alone. They also need the help of the community to reduce the opportunities for crime and the Government will continue to encourage public involvement in crime prevention.

Young People (Crime)

13. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to protect the public by diverting young people from criminal activity.

Mr. John Patten: The Government are developing their programmes in diverting young people from crime. The Home Office safer cities programme includes those aimed at reducing young people's involvement in criminal activity. Local activities for young people will also be an important theme of the first-ever national Crime Prevention Week, which is to be held from 15 to 20 April, and we are working with the Department of Education and Science in its consideration of measures to reduce truancy. The Government also think that some parents could do very much more to control their children's behaviour, and the emphasis on parental responsibility in the Criminal Justice Bill will encourage them to do so.

Channel 3 Licences

14. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the ownership restrictions for Channel 3 licences.

22. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the ownership restrictions for Channel 3 licences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have received a number of representations about our earlier proposals relating to dual ownership of Channel 3 licences, and my right hon. Friend announced on 28 January, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), an additional temporary restriction on ownership of licences covering contiguous areas.

Local Government Finance

15. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have now been summonsed in the Merseyside area for non-payment of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: By the end of December 1990, the six magistrates courts in the Merseyside area—Knowsley, Liverpool, St. Helens, North Sefton, South Sefton and Wirral—had issued a total of 47,360 summonses in relation to non-payment of the community charge.

Constituency Boundaries

16. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the timetable for the next review of boundaries for Parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold: There are four separate and independent boundary commissions, one for each part of the United Kingdom. The next general review of constituencies in England is expected to start in 1991. The commission for Wales has not yet decided when it will commence its review, but both commissions will report within the statutory time scale. I understand that the position is similar in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of preparations made by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for the review of parliamentary boundaries in England following publication of the electoral register for 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am advised by the commission that its preparations for the next general review are well advanced. These preparations have included a policy review of their procedures and an investigation into the increasing use of information technology to support its work. A booklet that explains the commission's work, and which will be available to the public, is in the final stages of preparation.

Probation and After-care Service

17. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the probation and after-care service.

Mr. John Patten: The Green Paper, "Supervision and Punishment in the Community"—Cm 966—which was published in February 1990, set out options for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the probation service in order to meet the demands of the Criminal Justice Bill. More than 160 responses have been received. The options are being carefully considered and we expect to announce our conclusions soon.

Foreign Nationals

18. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department plans any further action in respect of foreign nationals resident in the United Kingdom in connection with the Gulf war.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Any foreign national who is considered a threat to national security is liable to be deported. Changes to the immigration rules introduced from 19 January provide for Iraqis to be refused visas, leave to enter and extensions of stay in the United Kingdom and an order has been made requiring all Iraqis with limited leave to remain to register with the police. I will not hestitate to take further action if this proves necessary.

Magistrates Courts

19. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in response to his publication "Scrutiny of Magistrates Courts"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have received views from the representative organisations of the magistrates courts committees, individual members of the service and other interested parties. No decisions have yet been reached on the reorganisation proposals in the report of the scrutiny.

Football (Policing)

20. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what stage has been reached in the issuing of the Home Office circular to police authorities on the subject of charges for policing at football matches.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We will take a final decision on the terms of the circular as soon as possible.

Human Rights

21. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to assure himself that current procedures and practices relating to refugees meet proper human rights and civil liberties standards.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government's current review of asylum arrangements is taking full account of our obligations under relevant human rights instruments. I am satisfied that current procedures are wholly consistent with our obligations to refugees under the 1951 United Nations convention.

Citizenship Applications

24. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British citizenship are currently outstanding; and when he expects the waiting time to fall below 12 months.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of December 1990, there were 86,200 applications for citizenship outstanding. I cannot forecast when the waiting time will fall below 12 months.

The Gulf (Terrorism)

25. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqis and other Arabs suspected of potential involvement with terrorist actions arising out of the Gulf conflict have been detained; and how many have been deported.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 101 Iraqis and 10 others have been detained for reasons of national security since 2 August. Three Iraqis have been deported.

Police Authorities

26. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he proposes to make of the impact of poll tax capping powers in 1991-92 on the ability of police authorities to carry out their statutory duties.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is for each police authority to set its budget at a level which enables it to carry out its statutory duties but it must also have regard to the need for economy and the Government's intended criteria for community charge capping. Actual decisions on capping can be taken only when local authorities have set their budgets. These decisions will take account of all appropriate considerations, including the scope for greater efficiency and economy and, in the case of police authorities, their statutory responsibilities and the maintenance of manpower at the level my right hon. Friend has approved.

Crime

27. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any proposals for new measures to combat rising crime.

Mr. John Patten: We shall continue to pursue vigorously our policies to combat crime and protect the public. Additional people and money will be made available to the police this year. The provisions of the

Criminal Justice Bill will enhance the courts' powers to deal effectively with offenders. We are expanding our substantial programme of crime prevention measures, with four new safer cities projects recently announced.

VIPs

28. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he takes of the cost of the provision of security cover to VIPs in the Thames Valley police authority area when setting budget and manpower levels.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In assessing the manpower requirements of Thames Vally police, my right hon. Friend takes full account of the force's protection commitments, and receives professional advice from HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary. We do not set budgets for the force; that is the responsibility of the police authority.

Immigration Detainees

29. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been detained under the Immigration Act 1971 since July 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At 28 January there were 29 people detained under the Immigration Act 1971 who had been detained since before 1 August 1990. The number of people who have been detained for any period at any time since July 1990 could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Traffic Wardens

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to increase the number of traffic wardens in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The strength of the Metropolitan police traffic warden service has for some years remained well below the authorised ceiling because of difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Special pay additions were introduced in 1989 to help tackle this, and strength is now picking up, with 100 more wardens at the end of 1990 than a year before. Negotiations are currently in progress between the Metropolitan police management and traffic warden unions about a restructuring package which will improve career, pay prospects and management of the service.

My right hon. Friend has authorised an increase in the authorised ceiling for the service of 200 in 1991-92, bringing it up to 1,800.

Asylum

Mr. MacLennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Dublin convention determining the state of responsibility for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the member states of the European Community will be ratified in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The United Kingdom intends to ratify the convention when all 12 member states have signed it. Denmark alone has yet to do so.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what finances he intends to make available to local authorities to enable them to provide the secure accommodation necessary to meet court requirements under his proposals on the remand of alleged juvenile offenders.

Mr. John Patten: The Government intend to discuss with the local authority associations the financial implications of the proposals in the consultation paper on the remand of alleged juvenile offenders.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has given any recent guidance to local authorities regarding the enforcement of existing Sunday trading legislation.

Mrs. Rumbold: No. There is no reason to suppose that local authorities are not aware of their responsibilities under section 71 of the Shops Act 1950.

EMPLOYMENT

Pop Concerts

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to receive the first draft of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on pop concerts and similar events.

Mr. Forth: It is hoped that a first draft of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on pop concerts and similar events will be available for consultation in early summer this year.

HEALTH

NHS Charity Trust Funds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will arrange to place in the Library a copy of the letter issued by Mr. Duncan Nichol in the late summer of 1990 advising general managers to make greater use of NHS charity trust funds.

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Member will supply the letter's reference number and its date of issue, I shall write to him.

Residential Homes

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to monitor, and to assess the relative costs of, care in a private residential nursing or care home and those within local authority control and to monitor the provision of care in the community including administrative tiers of management;

(2) if he will monitor the policies of local authorities towards private nursing homes and residential care homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We shall be monitoring the progress of local authorities in implementing our policy on community care. In particular, the monitoring of community care plans—to be produced from April 1992—will look at the range of provision local authorities plan

to develop and commission. Monitoring will include looking at the resources applied to different forms of provision of care in the community and the development of a mixed economy of care. It will also include monitoring the performance of the arms-length inspection units which will be set up in April this year by local authorities to inspect residential care homes, in the public and private sectors.

Hospital Fires

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the number of fires, requiring the calling of the fire service or otherwise classified as significant, there have been at hospitals in England including accommodation units for doctors and nurses, in each of last five years; what casualties resulted in each year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The collection of the data requested is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. However, the following data, which are the latest available for England and Wales, are extracted from records published by the Home Office. There is no separate record of fires occurring in the accommodation used by doctors and nurses.

Hospitals	*1988*	*1987*	*1986*	*1985*	*1984*
Number of fires	2,416	2,296	2,223	2,308	2,146
Confined to items first ignited	1,653	1,572	1,563	1,634	1,544
Spread beyond item first ignited but confined to room, compartment or area of origin	714	699	633	655	580
Spread beyond room, etc	43	23	27	19	22
Number of deaths	7	2	2	3	3
Number of casualties	80	97	76	102	55

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received over fire safety arrangements in hospitals, including doctors and nurses accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has received one letter about fire safety arrangements in hospital premises. The National Health Service management executive is in routine contact with staff of health authorities on specific issues of fire safety in health care premises. Health authorities are required to observe fire safety legislation and the provisions of the building regulations which also set standards for structural fire precautions and means of escape.

Home Office guidance established the criteria for fire precautions in existing hospitals and "Firecode" published by the Department established specific criteria for new health buildings. Most hostel-type accommodation occupied by doctors and nurses is treated as "houses in multiple occupation" under the Housing Act 1985 as amended by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Following loss of Crown immunity enforcement will be the responsibility of the local housing authority.

Thyroid Cancer

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of thyroid cancer have been recorded in the northern region of England in each of the last five years; and how many deaths.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is shown in the table. The latest available data year for the number of newly diagnosed cases is 1985.

Number of (a) cases and (b) deaths from malignant neoplasm of the thyroid gland[1], Northern Regional Health Authority, 1981-89

Year	*Number of cases*	*Number of deaths*
1981	48	27
1982	50	14
1983	39	21
1984	38	22
1985	38	24
1986	[2]—	20
1987	[2]—	14
1988	[2]—	16
1989	[2]—	33

[1] International Classification Disease code 193.
[2] Figures not yet available.

Drug Prescriptions

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines have been provided to district health authorities and family health authorities in respect of which drugs should be *(a)* provided from hospital pharmacies and *(b)* prescribed by general practitioners; and under what circumstances a hospital pharmacy would refuse to provide a prescription in circumstances where a referral had been made from a general practitioner;

(2) if, in connection with the three-day rule for the prescriptions provided for patients discharged from hospital, he will indicate what regulations exist in respect of obtaining a continuation through the local general practitioner, taking into account weekends; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what exemptions exist to the restrictions placed on the prescribing of drugs from hospital pharmacies for those discharged from hospital treatment who are given a prescription for any three days prior to attending their local medical practice.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It has been the policy of successive Governments that responsibility for prescribing should rest with the doctor who has clinical responsibility for that particular aspect of an out-patient's treatment, whether that is the hospital consultant or the general practitioner. Where two doctors share care they should decide between them who should prescribe, bearing in mind the patient's best interests. A general practitioner may also ask advice on treatment from a consultant but still retain clinical, and hence prescribing, responsibility for the patient.

There are no central rules on the quantity of a medicine to be supplied to a patient on discharge from hospital. Hospital out-patient prescribing policies are determined locally, but are expected to be consistent with the general policy on prescribing. We would expect out-patients on discharge to be supplied with a quantity of medicine which allows them sufficient time to make appointments with their general practitioners and enables a proper handover of the patient from the hospital to the general practitioner.

In accordance with working paper 4 of the National Health Service review series, regional health authorities have been asked to examine out-patient prescribing policies within their region; to take a view of what is properly hospital or general practitioner prescribing, and to establish budgets for their district health authorities and family health services authorities on the basis of conformity with the Government's policy.

DHAs (Cross-boundary Funding)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice has been given to the district health authorities on meeting shortfalls arising from reductions in cross-boundary funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: From 1 April 1991, health authorities will be funded to purchase health care for their resident populations rather than funded for their catchment populations. In 1991-92, all district health authorities will be funded to enable them to purchase broadly the same volume of service as is currently being used by their population, whether in their own district or elsewhere.

The old system of allocation often worked to the disadvantage of districts with hospitals which attract patients from outside. Movement of patients across boundaries was reflected only retrospectively and was based on average costs. Now such districts will be paid directly and in full for all services they provide to non residents.

Liverpool Health Authorities (Property)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what valuations have been placed on *(a)* the Liverpool maternity hospital, *(b)* the seamen's dispensary, *(c)* land at 118-164 Woolton road, Liverpool, *(d)* land at 140 Woolton road, Allerton, Liverpool, *(e)* 126 Woolton road, Allerton, Liverpool, *(f)* 120 Woolton road, Allerton, Liverpool, *(g)* 128 Woolton road, Allerton, Liverpool and *(h)* district health authority offices at 1 Myrtle street, Liverpool, by the district health authority and by independent valuers;

(2) what were the first valuation and subsequent valuations placed on the Newsham general hospital by Liverpool district health authority prior to its disposal; and whether the hospital was the subject of an independent estate agent's valuation prior to disposal;

(3) whether *(a)* Liverpool maternity hospital, *(b)* Liverpool woman's hospital, *(c)* Park hospital, Liverpool and *(d)* the seamen's dispensary at Liverpool are to be sold at a price as set by an independent estate agent;

(4) to what extent the valuation of building materials was considered in the decision to sell the Newsham general hospital site in Liverpool.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis properties in Woolton road, Liverpool were valued for the purpose of disposal by the Liverpool district health authorities.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Members may wish to contact Michael Emberton, the chairman of Liverpool health authority, for details.

Key Specialties

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table indicating the changes in waiting times in key specialties, for consultations referred from general practice between January 1990 and January 1991 for *(a)* the United Kingdom as a whole and *(b)* Sheffield.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Neill, the chairman of Sheffield health authority, for details.

Breast Cancer

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those breast cancer screening units *(a)* with and *(b)* without a breast care nurse.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Social Services Staff (Training)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is considering to improve the training of social services staff.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 31 January 1991 I announced a new training strategy for the personal social services. We shall be making an investment of £5 million additional money in 1991-92, rising to over £12 million in 1993-94, in a strategy which will enable us to launch a balanced programme of initiatives aimed at improving the quantity and quality of training for the social services work force as a whole. These include:

£2 million in 1991-92 to boost the supply of practice learning opportunities for social work students, of which £1·5 million will be used for the appointment of new practice teachers;

£1·1 million in 1991-92 to fund extra Department of Health post-graduate grants;

£1·2 million in 1991-92 to enable Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and Certificate of Social Services courses to convert to new diploma in social work programmes;

£300,000 in 1991-92 to fund the development of a new framework for post-qualifying training, and the development of an advanced award. £50,000 in 1991-92 for grants to students on post-qualifying courses.

These initiatives are in addition to the training support programme, funding for which has been increased to £24·8 million for 1991-92. We believe that they represent a balanced programme of initiatives which will result in the improvement of the quality of qualifying training for social workers, increase the supply of qualified social workers, improve the training of the existing work force and increase the availability and take up of post-qualifying training.

We will be working in active partnership with the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, through whom many of these resources will be

channelled. Our new investment in the training strategy will make a major contribution to ensuring that social services staff are ready to take on the new roles and tasks facing them in the 1990s.

Student Nurses

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are *(a)* the average earnings of a student nurse in London and *(b)* a project 2000 bursary.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Student and pupil nurses on traditional courses make a substantial service contribution during the course of their training and receive a salary as well as in most cases a number of leads and allowances for the work they undertake. The estimated average annual earnings of a student nurse are as set out in the table.

	Inner London	*December 1991*	*Outside London*	*December 1991*
	£	£	£	£
1st year student nurse	7,970	(8,706)	6,380	(7,084)
3rd year student nurse	9,062	(9,867)	6,737	(8,195)
Project 2000 student				
under/26	4,700		4,000	
over/26	5,200		4,500	

Project 2000 students are supernumerary but are required to give not less than 1,000 hours of rostered service contribution, usually during the final year of their course.

Health Authority Laboratory Services

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the contracting out of laboratory services by the Yorkshire health authority and Bradford health authority to Yorkshire Water Enterprises Ltd.; what consultations have taken place with laboratory staff and their trade unions on this proposal; what consultation has taken place with community health councils and local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received four representations on this subject. Discussions within the Yorkshire regional health authority are at a very early stage and the authority is aware that there are a number of parties who would wish to express a view should firmer proposals develop.

Toxoplasmosis Immunity

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the earliest date after a pregnancy is confirmed that testing for toxoplasmosis immunity is carried out on blood samples taken from the pregnant woman; and whether any steps are being taken to standardise it throughout the country.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The test can be undertaken as soon as pregnancy is confirmed. On routine screening for this condition in pregnant women, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) on 13 November 1990 at column *110*.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *295*, whether a local authority's ongoing responsibilities to people after they have been placed in local authority care home trusts differs from its ongoing responsibilities towards people placed in local authority hostels.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 1 February 1991]:* In making arrangements for providing residential accommodation under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948 local authorities are under a statutory duty to have regard to the welfare of all persons for whom accommodation is provided, whether that accommodation is in the local authorities' own homes or provided under arrangements with the voluntary or private sector. People placed outside a local authority's own accommodation will be protected by contracts between the local authority and the establishment with whom the arrangements are made.

Local authorities have statutory duties of inspection in relation to residential care homes registered under part 1 of the Registered Homes Act 1984, including those registered on transfer by the local authority to an independent agency, and will be required to establish arm's-length inspection units in respect of their own accommodation from 1 April this year.

Local authorities also have a duty of care towards people placed in local authority hostels under schedule 8 to the National Health Service Act 1977.

In addition, local authorities are required to establish complaints procedures by April this year which will further safeguard those in residential care.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the yield in 1991-92 from freezing child benefit for all children over the age of five years at its current rate; and what increase in the rate of child benefit for children under the age of five years could be financed by such a freeze.

Mr. Jack: The yield would be approximately £240 million. This could fund an increase of £2·40 per week for each child under five to the current rate of child benefit of £7·25.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the years since 1961 in which the real value of child benefit or the family support which preceded it for a family with three or more children exceeded its value in 1961.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is contained in the table H3.07 of "Social Security Statistics 1990", a copy of which is in the Library.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing child benefit expenditure from 1991-92 broken down into *(a)* gross income bands, *(b)* gross equivalent income bands and *(c)* net equivalent income bands, showing the number of children falling into each band.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 January 1991]:* Information about the income of families receiving child benefit is not routinely collected. The following figures relating to the distribution of gross and net income are based on sample survey data which are subject to normal sampling and response variations. Table *(a)* shows the actual numbers of children in actual gross family income bands whereas tables *(b)* and *(c)* are derived from the process of equivalisation. Equivalisation is explained in pages 76-77 of "Households Below Average Income 1981-87" a copy of which is in the Library.

(a) Gross Income

Income bands £	*Number of children (000s)*	*Child Benefit expenditure (£ million)*
Under 5,000	265	110
5-10,000	2,665	1,080
10-15,000	2,115	855
15-20,000	2,385	970
20,000 and above	4,830	1,960
Total	12,225	4,960

(b) Equivalised gross income

Income bands £	*Number of children (000s)*	*Child Benefit expenditure (£ million)*
Under 5,000	740	295
5-10,000	3,965	1,605
10-15,000	3,280	1,330
15-20,000	2,105	860
20,000 and above	2,150	880
Total	12,225	4,960

(c) Equivalised net income

Income bands £	*Number of children (000s)*	*Child Benefit expenditure (£ million)*
Under 5,000	750	300
5-10,000	5,505	2,225
10-15,000	3,575	1,455
15-20,000	1,390	570
20,000 and above	1,020	420
Total	12,225	4,960

Notes:

1. Estimates do not sum due to rounding.
2. Estimates are based on the 1986, 1987 and 1988 FES uprated to 1991-92 earnings and benefits levels.
3. Gross income is the family's total income from all sources including benefits.
4. Estimates take no account of any failure to claim income-related benefits.
5. Equivalence scales are calculated giving a married couple a value of 1·00. Details of scales are given in 'Households Below Average Incomes' (pages 76-77).

Claim Forms

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each benefit administered by his Department the steps taken by his Department to simplify the forms used by claimants.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

Attendance Allowance:
- Operational and policy review of forms.
- Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
- Impartial research and testing for revisions and improvements.
- Consultation with Welfare Departments and voluntary groups.

Invalid Care Allowance:
- Operational and policy review of forms.
- Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
- Impartial research and testing for revisions and improvements planned for April 1991.
- Consultation with Welfare Departments and voluntary groups.

Mobility Allowance:
- Operational and policy review of forms.
- Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
- Consultation with Welfare Departments and voluntary groups.

Social Fund:
- Operational and policy review of forms.
- Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
- Consultation with Welfare Departments and voluntary groups.
- Impartial research and testing for revisions and improvements.

Sickness Benefit:
- Operational and policy review of forms.
- Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Invalidity Benefit:
- Operational and policy review of forms.
- Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Child Benefit:
- Operational and policy review of forms.
- Staff suggestions have been made and adopted,
- Impartial research and testing for revision and improvements.

Family Credit:
- Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions

have been made and adopted.
Impartial research and testing for revision and improvement planned for February 1991.

Income Support:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
Consultation with Welfare Departments and voluntary groups.

Maternity Allowance:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

One Parent Benefit:
Operational and policy review of reforms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Guardians Allowance:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Industrial Death Benefit:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Retirement Pension:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
Consultation with Welfare Departments and voluntary groups.

Severe Disablement Allowance:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
Impartial research and testing for revision and improvement.

Statutory Maternity Pay:
Operational and policy review of forms staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Statutory sick pay:
Operational and policy review of forms.
Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
Impartial research and testing of information available in support of the form.

War pensions:
Operational and policy review of forms.
Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Widows' benefits:
Operational and policy review of forms.
Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Agency form (NHS benefits):
Operational and policy review of forms.
Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.
Impartial research and testing for revision and improvements.

War widows' or dependents' pension:
Operational and policy review of forms.
Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Widowed mother's allowance:
Operational and policy review of forms.
Staff suggestions have been made and adopted.

Local Offices, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many items of post are outstanding presently at each of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area.

Miss Widdecombe: At Doncaster (East) office, there are 84 items of post outstanding. At Doncster (West) office, there are 4,742 items of post outstanding. Doncaster (West) is currently affected by an industrial dispute, all outstanding post is regularly examined and priority items extracted and actioned.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what change there has been in the numbers and time involved in waiting for a claim to be dealt with at his Department's offices in the Doncaster area, following the introduction of a computer system.

Miss Widdecombe: At Doncaster (East) office, retirement pension work was computerised in September 1989 and income support work in January 1990. In August 1989 there were 79 retirement pension claims outstanding, taking 14 days on average to clear. The comparative figures for December 1990 were 43 claims and nine days. In December 1989, there were 66 income support claims outstanding, taking two days on average to clear. The comparative figures for December 1990 were 76 claims and two days.

At Doncaster (West), retirement pension work was computerised in October 1989 and income support work in February 1990. In September 1989, there were 135 retirement pension claims outstanding, taking 28 days on average to clear. The comparative figures for December 1990 were 224 claims and 44 days. In December 1989 there were 261 income support claims outstanding taking six days on average to clear. The comparative figures for December 1990 were 450 claims and nine days.

The work of Doncaster (West) office is currently affected by industrial action.

Community Care Loans

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the level of funding of community care loans and grants at his Department's offices in the Doncaster area; what has been his response; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: No such representations have been received.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the cost of applying a test to prove disadvantage in getting a job for claimants of the disability working allowance; and what proportion of this cost will be attributable to adjudication costs.

Mr. Scott: The way in which the disability test for disability working allowance—DWA—will operate is set out in my letter of 4 February 1991 to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), a copy of which is in the Library. It is not possible to isolate the costs of individual elements of the adjudication process for DWA.

Poverty Trap

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the steps taken by his Department since 1979 to eliminate the poverty trap as defined in paragraph 44 of Cm 1514.

Mr. Jack: The Department has introduced a number of changes—including the assessment of income-related

benefits using net, rather than gross earnings and a major restructuring of national insurance in 1989. These measures, together with the reduction since 1979 in the basic rate of income tax from 33 to 25 per cent. and the increase in income tax personal allowances of 25 per cent. in real terms, have virtually eliminated the worst effects of the poverty trap and significantly reduced the numbers facing very high combined marginal deduction rates.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further proposals he has to eliminate the poverty trap as defined in paragraph 44 of Cm. 1514; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: As indicated in paragraph 7 of the DSS departmental report—Cm. 1514, February 1991—potential changes in benefits are assessed according to a range of criteria including the effects on work incentives. The effect on marginal deduction rates is, and will continue to be, one of the many factors taken into consideration when formulating policies.

National Insurance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration his Department has given to the possibility of abolishing national insurance contributions and meeting the costs of contributory benefits from taxation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The integration of national insurance contributions and income tax would weaken the contributory principle, which has formed the basis of the national insurance scheme since 1948 and holds that an individual should establish entitlement to contributory social security benefits through the payment of national insurance contributions. The subject was discussed in the 1986 Green Paper "The Reform of Personal Taxation", to which the Department contributed. The conclusion reached was that the disadvantages of such a move would outweigh the benefits.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list in table form the percentage of spending on social security benefits covered by *(a)* national insurance contributions by employees, *(b)* national insurance contributions by employers, *(c)* *(a)* and *(b)* together and *(d)* other Exchequer revenues for the years 1989, 1980, 1970 and 1961.

Mr. Jack: Information is not available in precisely the form requested. Information that is available is in the table.

Column 1 *Year*	*Column 2* *Social security benefit spend £'000*	*Column 3* *Employee's NI contributions as percentage of column 2*	*Column 4* *Employee's NI contribution as percentage of column 2*	*Column 5* *Total class 1 NI contributions as percentage of column 2*	*Column 6* *Exchequer payments to NI fund as percentage of column 2*
1989	46,128,234	25·08	31·99	57·08	3·58
1980	18,043,168	[1]	[1]	55·65	12·99
1970	3,284,248	[1]	[1]	59·60	10·78
1961	1,343,663	[1]	[1]	53·06	12·65

[1] Figures no longer available for these years.

Income Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioners receive income support.

Miss Widdecombe: In May 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, 15 per cent. of pensioners received income support. In the 10 years from 1979 to 1989 the proportion of people receiving retirement pension who need to claim income support has fallen from nearly one in five to less than one in seven.

Sources: Annual Statistical Enquiry May 1989 for Income Support recipients. Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for population figures.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish plans to amend the income support regulations regarding the award of the severe disability premium to persons in receipt of attendance allowance; and whether they will be retrospective.

Miss Widdecombe: The regulations concerned are the subject of an appeal to the Court of Appeal. When judgment is received we will consider what action, if any, to take.

Benefit Tapers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the tapers which apply to each of the benefits with tapers administered by his Department.

Mr. Jack: Family credit has a taper of 70 per cent. on income above the applicable amount. Housing benefit and community charge benefit, which are administered by local authorities, have income tapers of 65 and 15 per cent. respectively.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much it would cost to extend entitlement to the mobility component of the disability living allowance to those aged over 65 years.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 17 December at columns *86-87*.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of people of pensionable age qualify for cold weather payments.

Mr. Newton: By today, the severe weather payments scheme had already come into operation in nearly half the

areas defined for this purpose, and all the indications were that this number would rapidly be extended. In these circumstances, and in order to help ensure that vulnerable groups take appropriate steps to keep warm, DSS offices are being instructed to waive the seven-day qualifying period and to bring the scheme into operation in every area. We are also increasing the payment from £5 to £6 for any qualifying week. There are over 1·5 million pensioner households on income support, of whom we would expect a substantial proportion to qualify.

Benefits (Take-up)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each benefit administered by his Department, the legally enforceable obligations on his Department to encourage the take-up of each benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department is not obliged by law or statute to encourage take-up of benefits. However, it is our policy to disseminate as widely as possible all necessary information about available benefits to enable potential claimants to be aware of opportunities.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 8 February 1991

ENERGY

Coal Industry (Competition)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is considering measures to introduce further competition in the coal industry.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In the Coal Industry Act 1990 the first steps were taken to liberalise the coal industry, through the raising of limits on the number of men who could be employed to work underground in licensed mines, and by increasing the tonnage limits on the size of licensed opencast sites. Further competition will be introduced when the Government privatise the coal industry after the next general election.

Coal Mining Subsidence

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if the coal mining subsidence damage arbitration scheme that is administered by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators has been approved by his Department.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The new arbitration scheme for resolving disputes arising from coal mining subsidence damage has been voluntarily put in place by the British Coal Corporation and the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators with the encouragement of my Department. The Department was consulted on the draft rules of the scheme.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Relief Agencies

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional funds have been allocated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency consequent on recent hostilities in the middle east; and what additional sums have been sent by Her Majesty's Government to this and similar relief agencies.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on 4 February at column *14*. I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) about assistance for the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations relief agencies.

Overseas Aid

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given to the effects of oil price increases on the budget allocated to alleviate third-world poverty.

Mrs. Chalker: The cost of imported oil is an important factor in the economies of many developing countries. We supported plans by the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, to which we contribute from our aid programme, to provide help to countries adjusting to the oil price increases in the second half of 1990. These plans will be kept under review in the light of changes in the oil price.

Botswana

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any United Kingdom or EC funding has been made available towards the cost of the construction of a steel fence in the Okavango delta in Botswana.

Mrs. Chalker: No British or European Community aid funds have been made available for this purpose.

Somalia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Somalian authorities concerning *(a)* the detention of political prisoners and *(b)* alleged abuses of political detainees.

Mrs. Chalker: We have repeatedly raised these issues with the Somali authorities including at ministerial level over a long period. Following the fall of the Siad Barre regime there is at present no established authority in Somalia and information about conditions inside the country is hard to come by.

Tobacco

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on aid to the tobacco sector.

Mrs. Chalker: Tobacco remains an important crop and a source of export earnings and budgetary revenue in some developing countries. There is, however, increasing evidence that the health risks associated with tobacco consumption will affect developing countries most severely and place increasing burdens on their health budgets which in most cases are already inadequate.

In these circumstances, the Government have decided that in future the aid programme should not be used for any purpose which identifiably supports the tobacco sector. With immediate effect, no new bilateral commitments will be undertaken. We shall also advocate that multilateral aid agencies to which we contribute should pursue a similar policy. In addition we shall continue to help developing countries reduce their tobacco consumption, and maintain our assistance to farmers dependent on tobacco crops to diversify into alternative activities.

The same policy will apply to our assistance to eastern Europe.

TRANSPORT

London Regional Transport

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make additional resources available to London Underground to prevent staff redundancies and cuts from being made in peak hour services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider lifting current financial restraints imposed upon London Regional Transport.

Mr. Freeman: London Transport has requested additional funding this year and we are discussing its request with it. A statement will be made as soon as possible.

Semtex

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to require the mandatory installation of security systems capable of detecting Semtex explosives for all airports in the United Kingdom handling international air traffic.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer Thursday 7 February]:* The security arrangements already in place at our airports are capable of detecting explosive devices, including those containing Semtex. Our policy is to take all appropriate steps to improve those arrangements further and we will not hesitate to require the provision of any new equipment which would make a significant contribution whether developed under the Department's own aviation security research and development programme, or independently. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that any particular piece of equipment will guarantee 100 per cent. security.

Cliffe Marshes, Kent

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice his Department has given to the Port of London Authority with regard to the disposal of dredgings on land at Cliffe marshes, Kent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer Thursday 7 February]:* None. It is the responsibility of the PLA to investigate ways of disposing of silt dredged from the Thames and to seek any necessary statutory permissions.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Student Placements

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of students from institutions of higher education in Northern Ireland who were not offered a placement on their year out of university or other institution by the start of the academic year in the current year and the last two years; and how many in each case never got a placement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 6 February 1991]:* Placements are essentially a matter for the institutions, which have advised me that they do not hold information in the form requested. In the current academic year there are in Northern Ireland some 1,010 students on 50 separate courses involving year-long placements (compared with 980 in 1989-90 and 830 in 1988-89) and I have been assured that, through the combined efforts of the institutions and employers, the vast majority of this rapidly increasing group of students have always been placed for the full year.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Research Council

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the financial allocations to the research councils for 1991-92, identifying programmes and capital programmes earmarked in advance by Government; and what were the comparable allocations in the three previous years in real terms.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The allocations to the five research councils for 1991-92 announced on 24 January are as follows:

	£ million
AFRC	93·4
ESRC	35·5
MRC	200·4
NERC	122·6
SERC	451·3

None of the additional amounts announced this year was allocated to particular programmes in advance. The sums so allocated to particular programmes for 1991-92 in earlier settlements were as follows; redundancy costs as a result of reductions in MAFF research commissions £6·0 million (AFRC), AIDS £8·5 million (MRC), British Antarctic Survey (BAS) £6·2 million (NERC), British Geological Survey (BGS) £7·0 million (NERC), CERN £7·3 million (SERC), ERS2 instruments £2·0 million (SERC).

For the three preceding years the total grant to each council and the sums specifically allocated in earlier settlements (at 1991-92 prices) were as follows:

£ million

Council	*Grant in Aid*	*Specific allocations*
1990-91		
AFRC	91·8	MAFF 4·0
ESRC	38·4	—
MRC	196·8	AIDS 8·5
NERC	114·2	BAS 25·7, BGS 5·3
SERC	463·3	CERN 7·7, ERS2 2·1
1989-90		
AFRC	87·4	MAFF 3·0
ESRC	36·6	—
MRC	201·9	AIDS 9·2
NERC	131·6	BAS 10·5, BGS 3·4
SERC	460·5	CERN 10·6
1988-89		
AFRC	71·1	—
ESRC	33·7	—
MRC	178·7	AIDS 7·3
NERC	110·7	BAS 10·5
SERC	446·2	—

Nuclear Physics

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future funding of nuclear physics by the Science and Engineering Research Council.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received about the future funding of the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have received 120 representations about the nuclear structure facility at the Daresbury laboratory of the Science and Engineering Research Council.

As part of a review of all its future activities, the council decided on 6 February to make plans for the possible closure of the nuclear structure facility. To assist its further consideration of this issue, the council is establishing a study to assess the importance of the nuclear structure science in the context of the council's work as a whole.

Stratford School

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice he received from Her Majesty's inspectors of schools on Stratford school, Stratford.

Mr. Eggar: Advice submitted to the Secretary of State on the application by Stratford school for grant-maintained status and on Newham local education authority's proposal under section 12 of the 1980 Education Act to cease to maintain the school took account of HMI advice derived from inspection visits to the school.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the dates and purpose of all visits made to Stratford school, Stratford by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools, since 1 January 1990.

Mr. Eggar: The following visits have been made by HMI to Stratford school since 1 January 1990.

13 February 1990: one day general visit.
15 January 1991: one day general visit.

In addition, HMI has made a small number of very short visits to talk to the acting head.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library a copy of any reports on Stratford school prepared by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools.

Mr. Eggar: No inspection report on Stratford school has been produced by HMI and published by the Secretary of State since 1983 when such reports were made public.

First Aid

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to introduce the teaching of first aid as part of the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: First aid training is a matter for determination by individual schools. This will continue to be the case under the national curriculum. Some core and foundation subjects will however provide specific opportunities for such training. In addition, the National Curriculum Council's non-statutory guidance on health education, "Curriculum Guidance 5: Health Education", recommends that safety education, including a knowledge of basic first aid, should be a key component in schools' health education programmes.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all local education authorities in England in rank order of expenditure per secondary pupil per year, starting with the higher spending authority, together with their position in the table of examination results for school leavers achieving grades A to C at GCSE in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Fallon: The table gives the net institutional expenditure per secondary school pupil in the financial year 1988-89, and averaged examination results for three years 1986-87 to 1988-89. The purpose of averaging is to reduce sampling error within the derived percentages. Comparable information is not yet available for 1989-90.

LEA	*[1] [2] Net Institutional Expenditure per pupil 1988-89 (£)*	*Proportion of leavers with 5 or more results at Grades A to C[3] as percentage of all school leavers*	*rank*
ILEA	2,505	15·9	91
Waltham Forest	2,435	12·7	94
Brent	2,305	20·6	78
Ealing	2,145	22·5	67
Newham	2,140	14·9	93
Croydon	2,040	22·1	70
Knowsley	1,990	8·5	96
Barking	1,970	11·3	95
Coventry	1,940	21·2	76
Liverpool	1,905	19·4	84
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,900	32·2	10
Hounslow	1,895	25·2	49
Sandwell	1,885	15·5	92
Walsall	1,885	23·4	59
Hillingdon	1,870	22·7	65
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,870	21·6	74
Havering	1,860	24·4	57
Salford	1,860	23·2	62
Wigan	1,845	30·2	18

LEA	[1][2] Net Institutional Expenditure per pupil 1988-89 (£)	Proportion of leavers with 5 or more results at Grades A to C[2] as percentage of all school leavers	rank
Dudley	1,840	25·5	47
South Tyneside	1,825	22·2	68
Barnet	1,820	38·9	2
Sheffield	1,810	22·2	68
North Tyneside	1,780	27·5	36
Bromley	1,770	29·9	19
Gateshead	1,770	20·4	80
Cleveland	1,770	26·5	43
Leicestershire	1,770	25·1	51
Wirral	1,755	27·8	31
Derbyshire	1,755	24·6	54
Wolverhampton	1,745	19·9	81
Hertfordshire	1,745	31·9	11
Nottinghamshire	1,745	23·4	59
Harrow	1,740	38·6	3
Redbridge	1,735	25·5	47
Bury	1,730	27·7	33
Stockport	1,730	28·6	25
Enfield	1,715	26·9	41
Buckinghamshire	1,715	36·0	5
St. Helens	1,710	20·5	79
Trafford	1,710	30·7	15
Rochdale	1,700	20·9	77
Shropshire	1,695	30·3	17
Humberside	1,690	22·6	66
Bexley	1,685	28·5	26
Cumbria	1,685	28·0	29
Calderdale	1,665	21·5	75
Sunderland	1,665	21·8	72
Oxfordshire	1,665	27·7	33
Merton	1,660	24·6	54
Tameside	1,660	27·1	39
Doncaster	1,655	21·7	73
Solihull	1,650	31·7	12
Barnsley	1,645	19·7	82
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,640	32·4	8
Birmingham	1,640	19·1	85
Bolton	1,635	28·7	24
Rotherham	1,635	23·0	63
Bedfordshire	1,635	24·9	52
Essex	1,635	27·4	37
Surrey	1,635	38·0	4
Warwickshire	1,635	28·5	26
Sutton	1,630	39·1	1
Avon	1,630	27·8	31
Northumberland	1,630	30·7	15
Kirklees	1,620	25·6	46
Lancashire	1,620	26·8	42
Staffordshire	1,610	24·9	52
Bradford	1,605	16·9	88
Sefton	1,600	28·5	26
North Yorkshire	1,595	34·5	7
Oldham	1,590	18·1	86
Norfolk	1,585	24·5	56
Hampshire	1,580	29·6	21
Durham	1,575	23·4	59
Berkshire	1,570	32·3	9
Somerset	1,570	27·1	39
East Sussex	1,565	31·4	13
Wiltshire	1,555	25·9	45
Leeds	1,545	22·0	71
Cheshire	1,545	29·1	23
Gloucestershire	1,545	31·2	14
Northamptonshire	1,545	22·8	64
Devon	1,535	26·3	44
West Sussex	1,530	35·5	6
Cornwall	1,525	29·9	19
Isle of Wight	1,495	19·5	83
Dorset	1,485	27·6	35
Suffolk	1,485	24·2	58
Cambridgeshire	1,480	28·0	29
Kent	1,475	27·3	38
Lincolnshire	1,475	25·2	49
Hereford and Worcester	1,440	29·2	22

LEA	[1,2] Net Institutional Expenditure per pupil 1988-89 (£)	Proportion of leavers with 5 or more results at Grades A to C[3] as percentage of all school leavers	rank
Haringey	n/a	16·6	89
Manchester	n/a	16·4	90
Wakefield	n/a	17·5	87

Notes to Table

1. Net institutional expenditure includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises, and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.
2. The expenditure figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DOE and pupil number returns to DES. N/A denotes that an expenditure return has not been received from an LEA.
3. The examination data are aggregated from the results of a sample survey for the academic years 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89. The survey is based on a 10 per cent. sample of pupils in maintained and independent schools (excluding special schools) who have reached the minimum school leaving age. The percentages quoted do not reflect the achievements of pupils at O-level, CSE or GCSE after leaving school; nor their attainments in examinations leading to vocational or other qualifications at school or elsewhere. The data includes grades A-C at O-level and CSE grade 1.

Primary Schools (Open Enrolment)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what are his reasons for setting the date of September 1992 for implementation of the open enrolment scheme for primary schools; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what was the reason for giving local education authorities seven weeks to respond to the circular on open enrolment in primary schools; on what date the circular was received by local education authorities; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations he has received from local authorities on the amount of time allowed for response to his circular on open enrolment in primary schools.

Mr. Fallon: More open enrolment is one of the key provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988, designed to remove artificial limits to parental choice of school. In announcing its implementation in secondary schools from September 1990, the then Secretary of State expressed the hope that all primary schools would also forthwith admit pupils on demand up to the limit of their physical capacity, and many already do so.

September 1992 is the earliest practical date to bring these provisions into formal effect for all primary schools; the necessary procedures have been simplified and the consultation process carried out so as to meet that target. The draft circular and statutory order were dispatched to LEAs on 11 December.

Some 65 responses have now been received; the majority of respondents have taken the opportunity to comment on the length of the consultation period. The final versions of both documents will be in schools and LEAs later this term so that any necessary adjustments can be made before admission limits for 1991-92 are published this autumn.

Animals (Scientific Procedures)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what will be the capital cost to British universities of implementing the Home Office's code of practice for the housing and care of animals used in scientific procedures;

(2) what financial provision has been earmarked for implementing the Home Office's code of practice for the housing and care of animals used in scientific procedures in each of the next three financial years; and whether this provision is contained within block grant or capital provision.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 5 February 1991, *Official Report*, column *131*.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *221*, whether he has appointed any further non-executive directors to the board of the Student Loans Company.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have today appointed Mr. Gavin Burnett as a second non-executive director of the board of Student Loans Company Ltd. This appointment will bring substantial experience of accountancy to the company's board.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Repair Agencies

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the support for 1990-91 and 1991-92 from his Department to all the housing repair agencies *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in Suffolk and *(c)* in Norfolk.

Mr. Yeo: The current estimated outturn for support by my Department to home improvement agencies in 1990-91 is £2,078,500. However, this sum is not paid directly to individual agencies. It is paid to Care and Repair Ltd., and the National Home Improvement Council, which are then responsible for allocating it to individual schemes. My Department does not therefore have any record of the amounts paid currently to schemes in individual counties, although this information will be available after the end of the financial year.

The total amount which we have allocated in support of individual agencies in 1991-92 is £2,724,751; and I am pleased to be able to inform my hon. Friend that letters are being sent to local authorities informing them of the allocations to individual schemes. Of these, £19,483 has been offered in support of an agency in Suffolk and £22,032 in support of an agency in Norfolk.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the cost of providing exemption from the poll tax for all Gulf personnel for the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: The revenue forgone from such exemptions would depend on how long British forces are stationed in the Gulf.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the provision of reimbursement of income forgone to those local authorities which are providing exemption from the poll tax for Gulf personnel.

Mr. Portillo: We are giving careful consideration to a number of representations on this point.

Local Government

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those local authorities that have been issued, since 30 October 1990, with *(a)* section 13 notices, *(b)* section 14 notices, both under the Local Government Act 1988, *(c)* section 19a and *(d)* section 19b notices, both under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, giving dates of issue in each case.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows:

(a) notices under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988:
—London Borough of Haringey—12 December 1990
—Eastleigh Borough Council—18 December 1990
—Redditch Borough Council—18 January 1991.

(b) directions under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988:
—London Borough of Camden—31 October 1990
—Woodspring District Council—8 November 1990
—Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council—11 December 1990
—Thurrock Borough Council—19 December 1990
—Liverpool City Council—4 January 1991 (revised direction, replacing direction of 6 August 1990)
—Leicester City Council—29 January 1991 (revised direction, replacing direction of 19 December 1990).

(c) notices under section 19a of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980:
—Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council—10 October 1990
—Wycombe District Council—12 December 1990
—Eastleigh Borough Council—18 December 1990
—Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council—7 February 1991.

(d) no directions have been made under section 19b of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 since 30 October 1990.

Hazardous Waste (Transport)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what support Her Majesty's Government are giving to proposals for an international code for transport of hazardous waste.

Mr. Baldry: The Government played an active part in the negotiations which led to the drafting of the global convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes which was adopted at a conference in Basel, Switzerland in March 1989 convened by the United Nations Environment Programme. The Commission of the European Community has prepared a draft regulation on shipments of waste within, into and out of the Community which will inter alia allow EC member states to ratify the convention. Negotiations on the regulation have begun in the Environment Council and the Government have asked that they are completed as soon as possible.

Cleaning Agents (Pollutants)

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the results of his study of the problems caused by pollutants in cleaning and conditioning agents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: A draft report has been received from CES (Consultants in Environmental Sciences Ltd.) and is currently being discussed with officials. We expect to receive a final report by the end of February. I will arrange for copies of the document to be placed in the Library of the House.

Business Rates

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in England *(a)* the change in business rate poundage between the last year of the old system and the first year of the national non-domestic rate and *(b)* the percentage change in the average business rate bill over the same period.

Mr. Heseltine: In the old system each authority set its own rate poundage. Under the new system there is one poundage set nationally. However, poundages must be considered in conjunction with the relevant rateable values of properties before any inferences can be drawn of the effect of the new system. The highest poundage under the old system was 400·2p in Sheffield; the lowest was 122·2p in Kensington and Chelsea; and the average for England was 258·3p. The national poundage for England under the new system for 1990-91 was 34·8p. This was set so as to produce a yield equal in real terms to that from business in 1989-90.

I am arranging for copies of a table showing the percentage change in average non-domestic rate bills in each local authority area between 1989-90 and 1990-91 to be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf Oil Slick

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give further details of the resources being made available by Her Majesty's Government to deal with the oil slick released from the Mina al-Ahmadi terminal in the Gulf.

Mr. Heseltine: Details of the action being taken by Her Majesty's Government to assist Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to cope with the oil spills caused by Iraqi action are set out in my letter of 6 February which has been sent to all hon. Members, additional copies of which are being placed in the Library today.

The Gulf

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what study he is making of the importance of coral islands in the replenishment of fish, and the role of fish larvae in coral atolls in the Gulf.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* At the Government's request, an urgent study has been prepared by the Natural Environment Research Council on the biological effects of the Gulf oil spills. This and other assessments available to me confirm that coral reefs have a significant role in supporting fish larvae for certain species. Of even greater importance to fish stocks in the Gulf as a whole are likely to be the seagrass beds and mangroves which are major nursery grounds both for shrimps and fin fish. The Government unreservedly condemn the action of Iraq in deliberately placing these habitats at serious risk.

Hazardous Waste (Africa)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards the decision taken by Environment Ministers of member states of the Organisation of African Unity, in Mali, on 29 January, to ban the import of hazardous and nuclear wastes into Africa; and if he has discussed the implications of the OAU decision with his counterparts in the European Environment Council.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* The Government respect the decision of any country to ban the import of hazardous and nuclear waste and oppose in the strongest terms the export of such wastes to African and other developing countries. EC directive 84/631, as amended, prohibits the export of hazardous wastes from the European Community unless the country of destination gives its consent and the recipient disposal facility operates without risk to human health and the environment. The directive has been implemented in Great Britain by the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988. Nuclear wastes are not exported from the United Kingdom to Africa or to any other destination, except that in respect of post-1976 reprocessing contracts it is intended to return to the country of origin the waste component which may result from reprocessing spent nuclear fuel. The OAU decision has not been discussed in the EC Environment Council.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement in respect of the operation of the automated low-flying inquiry and notification system.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The planned automated low-flying inquiry and notification system (ALFENS) will enhance safety by improving the availability of timely and accurate information to aircrew and provide more flexible deconfliction arrangements at night.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information, advice and recommendations have been made by AEA Safety and Reliability and AEA Technology concerning the danger of reactor cracks and other faults in nuclear submarines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As I told the House previously, *Official Report*, 5 December 1990, columns *157-58*, our nuclear submarines operate in accordance with rigorous safety standards and with the endorsement of the nuclear-powered warship safety committee (NPWSC), which provides the Ministry of Defence with independent expert advice on the construction, operation and maintenance of these vessels. The Department also receives advice from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (AEA); the NPWSC, of which the United Kingdom AEA is an associate member, has access to this advice. It is not our practice to reveal details of the advice provided.

The Gulf

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many New Zealand armed forces personnel have been seconded or temporarily transferred to work with the British Army in the middle east.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of 76 personnel from the New Zealand armed forces are currently serving with British forces in the Gulf.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimated replacement procurement cost for the equipment used or destroyed in the Gulf war.

Mr. Alan Clark: To date the value of equipment lost and ammunition consumed since hostilities began is approaching £200 million. No decisions have yet been taken on the replacement of lost equipment.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent to which the precision-guidance equipment fitted to RAF aircraft in the Gulf is capable of minimising deaths of civilians and others in locations close to the target.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Allied pilots have instructions to attack only military targets which could pose a threat to allied forces or facilities which are supporting Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. The precision which can be achieved with laser-guided weapons means that aircrews can be confident that those targets can be hit with a high degree of accuracy.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum age below which British service men and women are not permitted to serve with the forces in the Gulf conflict.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The minimum ages for service in the Gulf with the British armed forces are as follows:

	Men	*Women*
Royal Marines	17 years	—
Army	17 years 3 months	18 years
Royal Air Force	17 years 6 months	18 years

There is no minimum age for service in the Gulf in the Royal Navy. The minimum age for entry to the Royal Navy is 16 years for men and 17 years for women. In practice, men serving in the Gulf are normally at least 17 years of age and neither men nor women would be sent to the Gulf until they had received the appropriate training for their trade.

Chieftain Tank

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is still his intention to place an order to replace the Chieftain tank for the British Army; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 1 November 1990, *Official Report*, Volume 178, column *770*.

"Middle East Defence News"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will arrange for his departmental library to subscribe to *Middle East Defence News*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The MOD library has not yet received a sample copy of MEDNEWS from the French publishers, but will consider subscribing to the newsletter if it adds to the information already available to the Department.

HEALTH

RHAs (Development Money)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the regional health authorities which are currently distributing development money to their districts according to a system based largely on *(a)* the weighted capitation formula and *(b)* the resource allocation working party formula; and for those still relying on the resource allocation working party formula, if he will indicate the transition periods envisaged by the regions.

Mr. Dorrell: Funding of district health authorities changes from 1 April 1991 and the RAWP formula will no longer be relevant. From this date they will be funded on the basis of resident populations rather than catchment population. In 1991-92 they will be funded to enable them to purchase broadly the same volume of services as is currently used by their population; but we have asked all regions to make a start in 1991-92 towards district allocations based on weighted capitation. The decision to give all regional health authorities a minimum cash increase of 10 per cent. should enable all regions to make demonstrable progress towards this objective.

All regional health authorities have submitted details of their proposals for achieving funding based on weighted capitation at district level. We are analysing the method and pace of change proposed by regions and will be formulating a national policy and timetable shortly.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank the regional health authorities according to the amount by which their allocation per head for 1990-91 exceeds or is less than the national average figure per head.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table.

Region	*Difference from National Average 1990-91 £s*
North East Thames	[1]11·83
North West Thames	9·83
Mersey	6·94
Oxford	2·73
South West Thames	2·72
West Midlands	0·88
National Average	0·00
North Western	−0·44
South East Thames	−1·83
Northern	−2·66
Trent	−4·37
Yorkshire	−4·95
East Anglian	−6·52
South Western	−7·06
Wessex	[2]−8·91

Note: Based on initial allocations for resident population weighted for age structure and relative health, before additions for SIFTR, Supra-regional services and other specific to individual regions.

[1] Above average.

[2] Below average.

EMPLOYMENT

Visually Handicapped People

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's total budget for 1991-92 for the employment training of visually handicapped people at specialist colleges.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department, through a central unit, contracts with four specialist providers for the training of visually impaired people in employment training.

Nationally, on the basis of negotiations with these specialist providers, a budget of around £3·7 million will be set aside by the unit for the training of visually handicapped people in 1991-92.

Training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies may also contract direct with local or other specialist providers. No forecast is available on this level of expenditure.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to the average fee per training week agreed by the Training Agency for the vocational training of visually handicapped people; how this fee is calculated; and what account is taken of inflation.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department, through a central unit, contracts with four specialist providers for the training of visually impaired people in employment training.

Training and enterprise councils, local enterprise companies and Employment Department area offices may also contract direct with local or other specialist providers. Fees for the centrally run provision are negotiated separately with each provider each year, taking into account inflation. Levels of local fees may vary considerably. No information is therefore available on the average weekly fee for the vocational training of visually handicapped people.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of *(a)* the proportion of visually impaired people of working age who are unemployed and *(b)* the proportion of unemployed visually impaired people who are long-term unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested. However, it has been estimated that in

1989, there were 194,000 economically active people—that is, people in or wanting work—of working age, who were visually impaired. Of these, 63,000 (32·5 per cent.) wanted work but were unemployed. No separate estimate is available of the proportion of economically active visually impaired people who were long-term unemployed.

The Employment Department provides a wide range of help for visually impaired people. This includes rehabilitation and training, specialist assistance with finding a job, provision of special aids and equipment, and a personal reader scheme.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to the level of expenditure in 1990-91 by the Training Agency to specialist colleges providing employment training for visually handicapped people.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department, though a central unit, contracts with four specialist providers for the training of visually impaired people in employment training. On the basis of current levels of trainees in training with these providers, it is expected that the total expenditure on training people with visual handicaps in 1990-91 will be £3·5 million.

Training and enterprise councils, local enterprise companies and remaining TEED area offices may contract direct with local providers. Information on this expenditure is not held centrally.

South Glamorgan TEC

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, what discussions he has had with the chairman of South Glamorgan TEC regarding the length of time taken in bringing its new headquarters into operation.

Mr. Jackson: I have had no such discussions.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

LINK

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sums have been allocated to each LINK scheme for 1990-91; and what sums have so far been committed.

Mr. Leigh: During 1990-91, six new LINK schemes (programmes) have been announced, with allocations as follows: transport infrastructure and operations (£5·9 million); asymmetric synthesis (£3·5 million); crops for industrial use (£3·05 million); enabling technologies for advanced rotorcraft (£2·4 million); medical implants (£5·0 million); and agro-food quality (£8·0 million); the total sum allocated to these programmes by Government is £27·85 million.

Previously, 21 programmes had been announced, with an allocation by Government of £141·25 million. Details of these programmes, and the £72·35 million so far committed to projects by Government and industry, are shown in the following table:

Programme	*Date announced*	*Government funding (£ million)*	*Total commitment to projects (£ million)*
Molecular Electronics	3 February 1988	4·00	5·00
Advanced Semiconductors	3 February 1988	12·20	7·55
Industrial Measurement Systems	3 February 1988	10·80	10·70
Eukaryotic Genetic Engineering	3 February 1988	2·80	4·20
Nanotechnology	3 February 1988	7·75	7·55
Biotransformations	15 April 1988	2·00	3·45
Personal Communications	13 June 1988	6·35	4·40
Selective Drug Delivery and Targeting	14 June 1988	1·50	1·65
Construction Maintenance and Refurbishment	14 June 1988	1·50	0·95
Food Processing Sciences	7 September 1988	7·00	5·45
Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration	17 April 1989	1·50	0·50
Optoelectronic Systems	26 April 1989	15·00	7·75
Design of High Speed Machinery	10 May 1989	10·50	2·65
Structural Composites	16 May 1989	21·25	1·45
Protein Engineering	12 June 1989	4·85	0·60
Biochemical Engineering	15 June 1989	7·50	4·25
New Catalysts and Catalytic Processes	19 June 1989	2·50	—
Power Electronic Devices and Derived Systems	27 July 1989	7·00	2·80
Control of Plant Metabolism	19 September 1989	1·55	—
Molecular Sensors	27 September 1989	5·50	1·00
Technology for Analytical and Physical Measurement	27 September 1989	8·20	0·55
	TOTAL	141·25	72·35

Biotechnology

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the funds *(a)* allocated for and *(b)* committed to, support for biotechnology; if he will give for the last calendar year all grants approved and their size; and if he will provide a regional analysis of spending so far approved.

Mr. Leigh: During 1990 my Department provided support for 94 projects in biotechnology subjects involving a total commitment from the Department of £19 million. This figure includes the full commitment to both projects in progress and new projects which started during 1990. The estimated spend for this financial year (1990-91) relating to these projects is £6·3 million.

These figures exclude significant sums spent by other Departments and research councils in support of biotechnology.

I regret that the information requested regarding regional analysis of spending is not available; we do not keep statistics on this basis.

Iraq

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the full extent of all discussions conducted by the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster during his visit to Iraq in 1988.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend's discussions were concerned essentially with commercial and economic relations and a new medium-term credit line, details of which have already been made public. In addition to the discussions on matters of commercial interest my right hon. Friend also spoke of the strong feelings in Britain about the use of chemical weapons against Kurdish Iraqi nationals.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the turnover surpluses and/or deficits on *(a)* the insurance services and *(b)* the project group of the Export Credits Guarantee Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 5 February 1991]:* The information requested is in ECGD's trading accounts for the years 1986-87 to 1989-90, which have been laid in Parliament. For the years 1980-81 to 1985-86, the trading accounts were prepared in a different format which showed the results of the guarantees issued analysed between commercial account (section 1 of the Export Guarantees and Overseas Investment act 1978) and national interest account (section 2).

The business included in these accounts as insurance services short-term business differs in some respects from that of the insurance services group which is to be privatised. The accounts are, therefore, not a guide to the profitability or otherwise of that business.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police, Kent

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police areas which cover each parliamentary constituency in Kent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A number of parliamentary constituencies covering London boroughs include areas which have Kent postal addresses. These constituencies are: Ravensbourne, Orpington, Chislehurst, Beckenham, Old Bexley and Sidcup, Bexleyheath and Erith and Crayford. All are within the Metropolitan police district. Constituencies in the county of Kent are all policed by the Kent constabulary.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for each police area in Kent, what are the most recent recorded figures for *(a)* crimes of violence against the person, *(b)* property theft, including thefts from vehicles and *(c)* burglaries;

(2) for each police area in Kent, what were the recorded figures in 1979 for *(a)* crimes of violence against the person, *(b)* property theft, including thefts from vehicles and *(c)* burglaries;

(3) for each police area in Kent what were the recorded figures in 1989 for *(a)* crimes of violence against the person, *(b)* property theft, including theft from vehicles and *(c)* burglaries.

Mr. John Patten: Information for the Kent police force area for 1979 is published in table 32 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1979", a copy of which is available in the Library. Figures for 1989 and the latest 12 months to the end of September 1990 have also been placed in the Library. Corresponding information for police areas in Kent is not collected centrally.

Alan Lord

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Greater Manchester on the circumstances surrounding the escape in 1990 from Astley Bridge police station of Alan Lord; if he will ensure that a public statement is issued concerning the results of an internal police inquiry; and if he will make a statement concerning the wider implications of security for dangerous prisoners in remand cells.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable that the prisoner escaped after a set of keys went missing at the police station. The incident has been the subject of an internal inquiry by Greater Manchester police and appropriate action has been taken in the light of its findings. Such an inquiry is entirely a matter for the chief constable.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing for each relevant category *(a)* existing fees for civil business in magistrates courts and *(b)* proposed fees for 1991-92.

Mr. John Patten: The fees to be taken by clerks to justices in respect of civil business are as prescribed in schedule 6 to the Magistrates Courts Act 1980. The fees have not been increased for 60 years. Last year the Home Office consulted the magistrates courts service about new fee levels which would reflect the costs of providing the services concerned, but no decisions about uprating have yet been taken. We shall bring forward proposals shortly.

Police Authorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the establishment by rank of each of the police authorities in England; and what is the number of vacancies in each rank in each authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table.

Establishment

Forces	Chief Constable[1]	Deputy Chief Constable[2]	Assistant Chief Constable[3]	Chief Superintendent	Superintendent	Chief Inspector	Inspector	Sergeant	Constable
Avon and Somerset	1	1	3	13	38	70	148	479	2,327
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	5	15	20	52	148	841
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	5	13	26	58	193	907
Cheshire	1	1	2	6	22	34	107	290	1,425
Cleveland	1	1	2	7	20	28	94	238	1,111
Cumbria	1	1	1	7	18	24	70	188	865
Derbyshire	1	1	2	8	26	35	101	263	1,356
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	3	13	37	47	135	458	2,168
Dorset	1	1	1	6	17	22	68	199	956
Durham	1	1	2	6	17	27	78	216	1,027
Essex	1	1	3	11	32	59	128	443	2,195
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	6	15	22	54	174	890
Greater Manchester	1	1	6	28	92	137	408	1,076	5,270
Hampshire	1	1	3	11	33	55	130	478	2,461
Hertfordshire	1	1	2	9	25	30	90	263	1,248
Humberside	1	1	2	8	24	38	106	324	1,503
Kent	1	1	3	11	37	48	174	443	2,300
Lancashire	1	1	3	13	42	70	159	522	2,390
Leicestershire	1	1	2	7	22	31	104	288	1,357
Lincolnshire	1	1	1	5	12	25	66	196	890
Merseyside	1	1	4	18	60	77	252	757	3,531
Norfolk	1	1	1	6	18	22	67	200	1,092
Northamptonshire	1	1	1	6	13	23	69	173	854
Northumbria	1	1	3	14	48	61	189	518	2,717
North Yorkshire	1	1	2	7	17	27	77	216	1,060
Nottinghamshire	1	1	2	9	35	41	131	339	1,785
South Yorkshire	1	1	3	11	38	47	159	456	2,282
Staffordshire	1	1	2	11	31	50	121	343	1,642
Suffolk	1	1	1	6	17	20	59	182	917
Surrey	1	1	2	7	23	22	93	259	1,251
Sussex	1	1	3	11	35	39	174	463	2,236
Thames Valley	1	1	3	12	38	46	175	510	2,899
Warwickshire	1	1	1	5	14	18	61	156	750
West Mercia	1	1	2	10	30	38	128	298	1,515
West Midlands	1	1	5	22	80	121	367	1,067	5,229
West Yorkshire	1	1	5	20	69	81	289	820	3,993
Wiltshire	1	1	1	6	16	21	58	172	822
City of London	1	1	1	6	11	20	56	127	575
Metropolitan	6	15	35	151	255	475	1,480	4,521	21,527

[1] Includes ranks of Assistant Commissioner and above in the Metropolitan Police and Commissioner in the City of London Police.
[2] Includes Deputy Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police and Assistant Commissioner in the City of London Police.
[3] Includes Commanders in the Metropolitan Police and City of London Police.

Vacancies at 30 November

Forces	Chief Constable[1]	Deputy Chief Constable[2]	Assistant Chief Constable[3]	Chief Superintendent	Superintendent	Chief Inspector	Inspector	Sergeant	Constable
Avon and Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	15
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	35
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	21
Cheshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	15
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	14
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	5	27
Devon and Cornwall	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	3	—
Dorset	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	7
Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	24
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	5	10
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	6	—	4	—
Hampshire	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	12
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	8	12
Humberside	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	4	11
Kent	—	—	1	—	—	—	3	6	24
Lancashire	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	33
Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	33
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	52
Norfolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	17
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	—
Northumbria	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	48
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	3	—	1	4	14

Forces	Chief Constable[1]	Deputy Chief Constable[2]	Assistant Chief Constable[3]	Vacancies at 30 November Chief Superintendent	Superintendent	Chief Inspector	Inspector	Sergeant	Constable
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	1	7	8	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	2	—	1	—	1	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	6
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	2
Surrey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	8
Sussex	—	—	—	1	3	—	—	2	—
Thames Valley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	1
Warwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Mercia	—	1	—	—	3	—	—	—	6
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	83
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
City of London	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan	1	1	—	—	4	—	50	62	208

[1] Includes ranks of Assistant Commissioner and above in the Metropolitan Police and Commissioner in the City of London Police.
[2] Includes Deputy Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police and Assistant Commissioner in the City of London Police.
[3] Includes Commanders in the Metropolitan Police and City of London Police.

Juvenile Courts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to require courts to *(a)* speed up the disposal of juvenile court cases and *(b)* cut down the period for which young people are remanded in custody or secure accommodation prior to a hearing.

Mr. John Patten: The consultation paper on juvenile remand urges all those involved to ensure that juvenile cases are dealt with without avoidable delay. Custody time limits apply to juveniles remanded in prison custody.

Metropolitan Police (Car Chases)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been killed or injured in each of the last five years as a result of car chases involving vehicles of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the number of fatalities in accidents following vehicle pursuits by police cars are as follows:

Year	Civilians	Police
1986	4	1
1987	8	0
1988	8	0
1989	12	1
1990	6	1

The only figures available for injuries in similar circumstances are as follows:

	[1]1988-89	1990
Officers injured	84	48
Members of public injured	93	43

[1] Two years taken together.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if statistics are kept by the Metropolitan police of incidents involving the high-speed chase of vehicles by the police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the force's statistical records of vehicle pursuits do not identify separately those which are conducted at high speeds.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the guidelines issued to Metropolitan police officers in respect of high-speed police car chases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Metropolitan police instruction manual contains instructions for officers answering urgent calls or pursuing vehicles. In particular, officers are advised that no call is so urgent as to justify an accident which may cause injury; that calls received by crews of police cars must not as a matter of course be answered at high speed, or without regard for the ordinary rules of the road; and that it is far better to let a criminal escape than to kill or injure innocent people as a result of an accident.

Metropolitan Police (Dismissals)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been dismissed from the Metropolitan police on disciplinary grounds in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is published annually by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis in his report.

Female Prisoners

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the female prison population were being held in prison for a first offence in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: The available information is published in tables 3.4 and 5.1 of "Prison Statistics England and Wales 1989" (Cm 1221), a copy of which is available in the Library. On 30 June 1989 about 16 per cent. of the female population serving an immediate custodial sentence was known to have had no previous conviction.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of girls aged under 18 years in adult prisons were housed in mother and baby units in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: On the most recent date for which such information is available, 31 October 1990, none of the approximately 25 females aged under 18 held in local and training prisons in England and Wales was housed in a mother and baby unit.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the national female prison population had dependent children aged *(a)* under five, *(b)* between five and 10 and *(c)* between 10 and 18 years in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on the children of women in custody is not regularly collected. However, a survey of 1,239 sentenced women in prison was conducted in December 1989. Of the 1,015 who responded to questions about dependent children, 600 said they had children or dependants under 18 years of age. More detailed information was given about the ages of 1,212 of the 1,321 children concerned. The figures are as follows:

Age	*Number of children*
0- 4 years	380
5-10 years	496
11-18 years	416

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of female non-United Kingdom nationals currently serving sentences in United Kingdom prisons have dependent children.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many girls aged under 18 years were held in adult prisons for the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: According to the records held centrally, which are approximate, about 25 females aged under 18 were held in local and training prisons in England and Wales on 31 October 1990.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of girls aged under 18 years in adult prisons were pregnant at the time of sentencing in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of sentence for women in prison in each year from 1980 to 1990.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on the average sentence length for females received under an immediate custodial sentence is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (tables 3.14 and 5.12 of the latest issue, for 1989, Cm. 1221). Data for 1990 are not yet available.

Policing, West Yorkshire

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications of the West Yorkshire police authority budget for 1991-92 on policing levels for the county.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on 7 February 1991.

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to increase the fee levels for citizenship applications.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Citizenship fees were last changed in April 1986 and some increases are necessary to recoup the forecast costs of dealing with citizenship applications. Regulations amending the British Nationality (Fees) Regulations 1984 are being laid before Parliament today with the intention that the following fee levels should come into operation on 1 March 1991:

	Present fees (£)	*New fees (£)*
Registration (adult or minor)	60	85
Naturalisation on grounds of marriage	60	135
All other naturalisations	170	170

The opportunity has been taken to remove the element of cross-subsidisation between the various categories of case which has come to light since fee levels were last revised. Although this has led to a considerable increase in the fee for applicants for naturalisation on the grounds of marriage, there is no increase for other naturalisation cases —about one third of all applicants—and a more modest increase in the fee for registration cases.

The existing arrangements for joint applicants will be unchanged: husbands and wives applying together for naturalisation will continue to pay one single fee, as will minor children of the same parent applying together for registration.

The practice of charging a nominal fee in respect of applications which are subsequently withdrawn or refused has been reviewed. This fee, currently £10, falls far short of the costs of processing such applications and the balance of costs incurred is currently met by the taxpayer. The Government consider that nationality fees should be set so as to cover the full costs involved in processing applications; and unsuccessful applicants who apply on or after 1 March 1991 will pay the full cost of processing their applications. This will be £60 for registration, £130 for naturalisation on grounds of marriage and £135 for other naturalisation.

The new regulations will also increase the fees payable to the Home Office for renouncing citizenship and for supplying copy certificates and other documents from £10 to £15. The fee for administering the oath of allegiance which is payable to the person administering the oath will be increased from £3 to £3·50 in order to bring it in line with fees for analogous work under the Commissioners for Oaths (Fees) Order 1988.

It is expected that the revised fee levels will provide sufficient income to meet the costs of processing applications over the period March 1991 to March 1992.

WALES

Juvenile Crime

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to increase the resources available to social services authorities in Wales to divert young people from criminal activity.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The local authority financial settlement for 1991-92 allows for an 8 per cent. increase in local authorities' revenue expenditure over their budgets for 1990-91. Within the total for 1991-92, the notional amount available for social services is £224 million, an increase of 9 per cent. over the amount local authorities are planning to spend in the current year. The constituent element for diverting young people from crime is not separately identified.

Additional resources are being provided, mainly under the urban programme, as grants for specific projects which directly or indirectly have the effect of diverting young people from criminal activity. The package for 1991-92 includes provision of £2·6 million for social schemes including holiday projects, community leisure and recreation facilities, youth education opportunities, crime prevention and miscellaneous self-help initiatives. Many of these projects will assist by helping to improve the environment in which young people grow up, and by giving them greater opportunities to pursue worthwhile activities; in so doing they will help to divert them away from any interest they might otherwise develop in criminal activity.

As part of the funding for the voluntary sector, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders is currently receiving a grant of over £50,000 per year for a juvenile crime prevention unit. This works with local authorities and other agencies in south-east Wales to develop crime prevention strategies, which are to a large extent aimed at ensuring that young people are diverted away from crime.

The responsibility for cultivating socially acceptable behaviour in young people is shared by many parts of society, with a particularly important role for parents and the family. Schools have a part to play in putting young people on the right road, and education support grants are being made available to local education authorities to support programmes with a wide range of activities within schools and the youth service which seek to reduce juvenile delinquency in schools, improve school attendance and promote social responsibility among young people. In 1990-91 this amounted to some £160,000 with a provision set for 1991-92 of £274,000.

Finally, initiatives are being pursued to divert young people and others from drug and alcohol abuse. Some of these are funded from the central initiatives to combat drug and alcohol misuse where the provision for 1990-91 is £1·8 million and £150,000 respectively.

Adoptions

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many children adopted from countries overseas in the last four years have been taken into the care of local authorities in Wales;

(2) from which overseas countries, which have allowed children to be adopted in Wales, have such children subsequently been taken into local authority care in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett Local authority statistical returns on children in care do not identify whether any such children were adopted from overseas.

South Glamorgan Health Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what loans he has authorised or made to South Glamorgan health authority in *(a)* the third quarter and *(b)* the fourth quarter of the current financial year; and for what amount and over what period.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A short-term loan of £2 million was made in the third quarter of this financial year, to be repaid in 1991-92. None has been made to the authority in the fourth quarter.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy not to approve the South Glamorgan health authority strategic plan without the inclusion of firm guarantees relating to the neighbourhood hospital construction programme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The broad thrust of the authority's plan was approved on 11 July 1989.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority in respect of statutory 90-day redundancy notices.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has had no consultations with the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority in connection with any redundancy issues.

Higher Education

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with *(a)* the chairmen of the health authorities and *(b)* the chairmen of the education committees of the five colleges to be directly funded from 1992 in Wales as regards the transfers of funding responsibility for higher education courses for paramedics from local education authorities to the national health service.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Consideration is still being given as to whether there should be a transfer of such funding responsibility in Wales. Appropriate consultation will be undertaken if a transfer is proposed.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Quality

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what actions he has taken to ensure food quality since the passing of the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the report by the food safety directorate on "Comparison of Methods for the Detection of Added Substances in Orange Juice". This report includes results of analyses of samples of orange juice purchased in this country. Although there is no food safety issue involved, it indicates that a large proportion of samples of the orange juice purchased did not fully match the description on the packaging. Laboratory analysis of the samples revealed widespread addition of sugars and other ingredients in orange juice sold as pure and unsweetened. Following the results of this

survey and in co-operation with local trading standards officers, who are generally responsible for enforcement, my officials are now carrying out further investigations into the sources of these wrongly described products. Enforcement authorities generally have been informed so that they can consider follow-up action in due course. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House.

North-east Drift Net Fishery

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department first received the report of the committees set up under the Salmon Act 1986 to inquire into the north-east drift net fishery; and what is now delaying its publication.

Mr. Gummer: Section 39 of the Salmon Act 1986 requires the presentation of a review to Parliament. Scientists at the Scottish Office and from this Department have produced background material, which is now being studied. We hope to present the review to Parliament shortly.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Gulf

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *695*, in relation to his letter of 28 January to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what evidence there is that Iraq is falsely claiming damage to Samarra, Kerbek and Najaf by bombing; and what evidence he has that actual damage has been avoided.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend did not claim that Iraq was causing damage by bombing to Samarra, Kerbela and Najaf in his letter of 28 January. He merely said he would

"be surprised if the Iraqis did not try to cause mischief by suggesting that they (the sites) *have* been bombed."

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the response of Her Majesty's Government to the proposals of the Nordic members of the United Nations organisation to dispatch a peace-keeping force to Kuwait to follow any Iraqi withdrawal.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcome the indication from the Nordic countries that they would be willing to participate in a United Nations initiative in the area following the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. It is for the countries of the region to take the lead in devising arrangements for their future security. These may involve the United Nations.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will support calls for a debate in the United Nations Security Council on the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the United Nations Security Council has met to *(a)* review the conduct of the war in the Persian Gulf and *(b)* discuss peace proposals from Arab, Muslim and non-Security Council members.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Security Council has discussed the situation in the Gulf on numerous occasions since the crisis began on 2 August 1990. It has adopted 12 resolutions with overwhelming majorities designed to bring about Iraq's full and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. Until there is firm and unequivocal evidence of Iraqi compliance we see no need for the Security Council to take further steps. Meanwhile it remains seized of the matter.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what undertakings have been given to the Israeli Government arising from their non-retaliation to Scud missile attacks.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None, but we have made clear our support for the courage and wisdom of the Israeli Government's policy of restraint.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional funding Her Majesty's Government are giving, or are planning to give, to *(a)* the Red Cross, *(b)* the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and *(c)* other organisations working with refugees to cope with refugees from the Gulf war; approximately how many refugees are expected from Iraq and Kuwait in the coming weeks; what other measures Her Majesty's Government are taking to deal with refugees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* In response to the United Nations relief agencies' first appeal, in September, for donations to assist the 850,000 people displaced by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Her Majesty's Government contributed some £11 million bilaterally and through the European Community. We gave a further $1 million bilaterally and $2 million through the European Community in response to the second appeal of 11 January.

We will also be contributing £2·5 million to a separate appeal from the International Committee of the Red Cross for its humanitarian work in the Gulf. Pending approval of a supplementary estimate, urgent expenditure will be met by repayable advances of £2·5 million from the contingencies fund.

We have kept in close touch with the Red Cross and the United Nations relief agencies as they have developed their contingency plans. These contingency plans provide for the welfare of 400,000 refugees fleeing of Jordan, Iran, Syria and Turkey and the rapid repatriation of developing country nationals.

Soviet Union

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has made to the Soviet Union in respect of applications to leave by *(a)* Sergei Veprinsky, *(b)* Alexander Rogach and *(c)* Alexander Gomelshy, all of Kiev.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We can certainly raise these cases with the Soviet authorities. We have details of the cases of Mr. Veprinsky and Mr. Rogach, but in order to make our representations most effective we shall need further details of Mr. Gomelshy's case.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations

he has made to the Soviet Union in respect of applications to leave by *(a)* Yakov Berlin of Leningrad, *(b)* Leopold Itkovitch of Novosibirsk and *(c)* Svetlana Myshkina of Moscow.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We can certainly raise these cases with the Soviet authorities, but in order to make our representations most effective we shall need further details.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being made to evacuate British citizens in eastern Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We do not think that the situation in eastern Saudi Arabia calls for the evacuation of British nationals. However, we have advised dependants to leave and while air services were suspended we arranged seats on aircraft organised by the Ministry of Defence. It is now possible to leave by commercial services from Riyadh and Jeddah, and travel by road between eastern Saudi Arabia and these cities is not a problem.

UN Security Council

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the text of the reports submitted by coalition Governments to the meeting of the United Nations Security Council held on 24 January.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House of reports submitted to the Security Council on or before 4 February on action taken pursuant to Security Council resolution 678.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which permanent member of the United Nations has vetoed most United Nations Security Council resolutions; and which country has vetoed the second highest number of resolutions since 1961.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The number of vetoes cast by each permanent member of the United Nation Security Council since (and including) 1961 is as follows:

	Number
United States	69
United Kingdom	28
Soviet Union	24
France	14
China	2

Advisory Companies

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *378*, what experience Mr. E. R. I. Allan OBE has on international exhibitions; who else was considered when his appointment as consultant was made; and what other organisations were considered when the British Atlantic Committee and Peace Through NATO were appointed to advise him on the presentation of defence and disarmament issues.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Mr. Allan had worked for the Central Office of Information for a number of years as director of the exhibitions division and later a group director before his appointment as a consultant in 1987. Mr. Allan's role as a consultant involves attending the international exhibitions bureau as a British delegate. Since Mr. Allan was, and still is, a vice-president of that organisation he was uniquely qualified for this role. No one else was therefore considered.

The British Atlantic Committee and Peace Through NATO offer informal and unpaid advice on the presentation of defence and disarmament issues. They are not appointed, nor have the Government considered appointing any consultants in this field. A wide range of non-governmental organisations, including the BAC and PTN, are invited to periodic meetings in the FCO to discuss current arms control and disarmament issues.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *378*, what other organisations were considered when Hariri Page was commissioned to advise on methods of evaluating information work overseas when Moon Communications were appointed consultants on the management of FCO publications; and what other organisations were considered when Shandwick plc and Young and Rubicam were appointed to advise on public and media response to the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Richard Moon and Associates (later Moon Communications) were appointed consultants on the management of FCO publications after a competitive tender. This consultancy also identified the need for a further study on information work overseas. As Harari (later Harari Page) had been engaged by Moon Associates to assist in the publications consultancy it was the natural choice for the further study on information work overseas.

Shandwick PLC and Young and Rubicam's advice has been informal and unpaid; they were not therefore formally appointed and the question of competitive tendering did not arise.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *378*, what other outside organisations are advising him on any aspect of public reaction to or presentation of the Gulf crisis; and whether it is his policy to employ competitive tendering when making appointments of consultants to advise him on public relations and allied matters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No other outside organisations are advising the Government on public reaction to or presentation of the Gulf crisis. It is the FCO's policy to employ competitive tendering when making appointments of consultants except where there are strong reasons for single tender action.

Children's Rights

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Britain to ratify the United Nations charter on the rights of the child.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 18 December 1990, column *121*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson).

Antarctica

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with the Governments of Japan and South Korea on mining in Antarctica.

Mr. Garel-Jones: None.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any review is taking place of Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of mining in the Antarctic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Following the outcome of the special consultative meeting in Chile, we are considering options to achieve a consensus, within the Antarctic treaty system, which is rational and scientifically based.

Falkland Islands (Land Sales)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the sale of land in the Falklands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Falkland Islands Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Anglo United plc, has offered its four remaining farms in the Falkland Islands for sale. Anglo's chairman has told me that his company remains firmly committed to the Falklands and will continue to develop its other existing and new interests in the islands.

Saddam Hussein

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met President Saddam Hussein; for what purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has only once met Saddam Hussein, in Baghdad on 27 March 1983, as Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. They discussed regional and bilateral issues. His visit to Iraq was part of a wider middle east tour, including Kuwait, Jordan and Lebanon.

SCOTLAND

Educational Institute

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Eduational Institute of Scotland to discuss educational issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend and I met representatives of the Educational Institute of Scotland on 28 January when we discussed with them issues of importance for education. The EIS raised a number of points to which my right hon. Friend and I responded as follows:

National Testing. The tests have been drawn up with assistance from serving teachers and are designed to fit with the normal assessments already carried out in most primary schools. They have no pass/fail element; the results will be confidential; schools can select test materials most suited to pupil ability. We urged that the misleading information which the institute had circulated to schools be withdrawn.

Teacher Supply. The Government have taken a series of measures to anticipate possible teacher shortages in the years ahead, including national recruitment campaigns with radio and press advertising plus direct contacts with university undergraduates and with schools. A new campaign this year will be aimed at priority subjects in secondary schools. Pay and conditions are obviously relevant to the attractiveness of teaching as a career, but are a matter for local authorities to determine. We support the current review of the role of the teacher in the 1990s. Education authorities and teacher unions have their part to play in supporting and encouraging potential recruits to the teaching force.

5-14 Development Programme. We welcomed the broad support from EIS for the programme. We pointed out that there had been recognition of a 10·8 per cent. increase in the overall assumed costs of education in local authority expenditure for 1991-92. We refuted claims that curriculum development within the programme was assessment dominated. Staff development had been identified as more pressing for some areas of the programme than for others.

Staff Development and Appraisal. National guidelines for staff development and appraisal allowed authorities to tailor their schemes of implementation to suit local needs and circumstances. Appraisal is fully situated within staff development and will play a central role in identifying teachers' professional training needs. Career review is only one of the functions of appraisal, but we were interested to learn that EIS did not exclude evaluation of performance as part of career review. The extra resources being made available to authorities of £2 million and £4 million in the 1991 and 1992 aggregate external finance settlements respectively recognised the new tasks for authorities arising from the guidelines.

Sandeels

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will decide on the ban on Shetland sandeel fishing proposed on 24 December 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Comments on the consultation paper issued on 24 December have been requested by 15 February. My noble Friend hopes to make an announcement on the future management arrangements for the fishery shortly thereafter.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in which years since 1980 the spawning stock biomass of Shetland sandeels has fallen below 20,000 tonnes; and what measures have been taken or proposed to reduce exploitation of this stock in subsequent years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Estimates made in 1990 indicate that the spawning stock biomass was below 20,000 tonnes in 1986, 1989 and 1900. The 1990 figure of 16,000 tonnes is the lowest estimate made over that period. Measures taken so far to reduce exploitation of the stock have been to restrict access to the fishery through a licensing scheme and to close the fishery during the second half of the year. These measures resulted in a substantial reduction in fishing effort. We are currently consulting interested parties on a proposal to close the fishery until stock levels recover.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest estimate of the Shetland sandeel spawning stock biomass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The spawning stock biomass figure for 1990 is estimated to be 16,000 tonnes.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to eradicate enzootic abortion in ewes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend is undertaking no specific measures to eradicate enzootic abortion in ewes, but members of the sheep and goat health scheme, operated by the state veterinary service, may opt to have their flocks monitored for the presence of enzootic abortion.

Wool

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to extend the guaranteed price system for wool for a further period of five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government's intention remains, as announced in October 1988, to end the wool guarantee as soon as possible.

Health Visitors

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the establishment figures for the current year, and for each of the last three years, for health visitor posts in each health board in Scotland; and what are the actual numbers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information for establishment figures is available for the last two years only and is shown in the table:

Health Visitors Funded Establishment

Health Board	[1] *1989*	[2] *1990*
Argyll and Clyde	118·1	121·7
Ayrshire and Arran	84·9	103·9
Borders	21·1	21·7
Dumfries and Galloway	28·8	28·0
Fife	110·2	96·1
Forth Valley	87·7	89·6
Grampian	167·0	167·0
Greater Glasgow	n.a.	n.a.
Highland	53·0	51·7
Lanarkshire	161·4	n.a.
Lothian	217·5	214·4
Orkney	7·0	6·0
Shetland	8·0	9·0
Tayside	95·2	100·6
Western Isles	n.a.	11·0
SCOTLAND	n.a.	n.a.

[1] At 30 September.
[2] At 31 March.

Health visitors in post at 30 September

Health Board	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	[1] *1990*
Argyll and Clyde	111·8	119·2	118·1	119·5
Ayrshire and Arran	95·9	105·7	119·1	123·4
Borders	24·6	26·1	27·2	26·2
Dumfries and Galloway	29·0	37·3	32·6	31·4
Fife	113·8	112·4	110·2	109·3
Forth Valley	93·1	89·6	89·6	85·3
Grampian	162·9	161·3	165·0	161·4
Greater Glasgow	318·9	322·7	333·3	313·1
Highland	44·3	46·0	47·3	50·6
Lanarkshire	148·8	160·8	160·9	158·7
Lothian	210·7	217·9	225·9	219·8
Orkney	6·0	7·0	7·0	6·0
Shetland	6·7	8·0	9·0	9·0
Tayside	99·7	90·9	104·3	104·0
Western Isles	12·0	11·0	10·0	10·0
Scotland	1,478·2	1,515·9	1,559·5	1,527·7

[1] At 31 March.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students in the current year, and in each of the last three years, are training to become qualified health visitors; and, of these, how many are *(a)* seconded and *(b)* sponsored by health boards; and what are the numbers for each board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is shown in the following table:

Student Health Visitors by Health Board as at 30 September

Health Board	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	[1] *1990*
Argyll and Clyde	4·0	—	9·0	9·0
Ayrshire and Arran	11·6	9·0	7·0	7·0
Borders	1·0	1·0	1·0	1·0
Dumfries and Galloway	4·0	3·0	2·0	3·0
Fife	7·0	5·0	6·0	7·0
Forth Valley	3·0	3·0	3·0	3·0
Grampian	17·0	23·0	18·0	16·0
Greater Glasgow	22·0	26·0	21·0	22·0
Highland	4·0	4·0	3·0	3·0
Lanarkshire	12·0	11·0	12·0	11·0
Lothian	18·0	20·0	14·3	19·0
Orkney	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	1·0	2·0
Tayside	7·0	10·0	6·0	6·0
Western Isles	—	—	—	—
SCOTLAND	110·6	115·0	103·3	109·0

[1] As at 31 March 1990.

Information on the secondment or sponsorship of these students by health boards is not available centrally.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many qualified health visitors in Scotland are presently *(a)* unemployed and *(b)* not employed as health visitors.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available centrally.

Thyroid Cancer

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of thyroid cancer have been recorded in Scotland in each of the last five years; and how many deaths.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of new cases registered in each of the last five years and the number of deaths over the same period are shown in the table:

Year	*Number of registrations*	*Number of deaths*
1985	122	33
1986	100	40
1987	89	32
1988	97	37
1989	92	29

MFV Antares

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the date of the opening of a fatal accident inquiry into the sinking of the MFV Antares; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The procurator fiscal at Kilmarnock is investigating the circumstances of the loss of this vessel and will report to Crown counsel. It is not yet possible to say when the application to the sheriff for the holding of a fatal accident inquiry will be made.

Forresterhill Hospital

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the written answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *554*, to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North, what proportion of the total cost of services in preparation by Price Waterhouse for the preparation of direct management unit and NHS trust status business places the £50,000 fee to Price Waterhouse represents; what was the total fee and which body or organisation funded the remainder of the fee.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* Revised figures provided by Grampian health board indicate that the total cost of the consultancy work carried out by Price Waterhouse was £156,000, of which £41,000 was met by Grampian health board directly and the remaining expenditure funded by the Scottish Office Home and Health Department and the university of Aberdeen.

City Technology Academy

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was budgeted to be spent on a city technology academy in the current financial year; how much has actually been spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 February 1991]:* Estimated expenditure for 1990-91 was £3·3 million. In addition, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of 17 January 1991.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 11 February 1991

ENERGY

British Nuclear Fuels

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects the annual report and accounts of British Nuclear Fuels plc for the financial year 1989-90 to be published; and what are the reasons for the delay in their publication.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand that the accounts of British Nuclear Fuels plc for the financial year ended 31 March 1990 will be filed with the Registrar of Companies during April 1991 and published as soon as possible afterwards. The accounts have been delayed as a result of negotiations on new contractual arrangements between the company and its two major United Kingdom customers, Nuclear Electric plc and Scottish Nuclear Ltd.

Redundant Mineworkers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action can be taken to recover overpaid moneys from claimants of benefit from the redundant mineworkers' payments scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Overpaid moneys are recovered by means of an immediate lump sum payment, or through a weekly deduction from continuing benefit under the redundant mineworkers' payments scheme, or through commitment to repay from a future entitlement such as a mineworker's pension, or through some combination of these three ways.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many actions were taken resulting in the recovery of overpaid sums to recipients from the redundant mineworkers' payments scheme; and what was the total sum of recovered moneys for the last year in which figures are available.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The data are not collated in the form requested. However, in the tax year 1989-90 around 2,600 actions were undertaken to recover over a number of years some £700,000 in overpaid moneys.

Coal Imports

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the total amount of coal imported from the Soviet Union for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Imports of hard coal from the Soviet Union have been as follows:

Calendar year	*Thousand tonnes*
1986	48
1987	89
1988	375
1989	181
1990	[1]592

[1]Provisional.
Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid Board

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the names, terms of office, salaries and former occupations of the present members of the Legal Aid Board.

The Attorney-General: The names and occupations or former occupations, of the present members of the Legal Aid Board are:

Names	*Occupations*
John Pitts (Chairman)	Former Chairman and Chief Executive of the Tioxide Group. Term of office, five years expiring May 1993
Martin Acland	JP, General Commissioner of Income Tax and former Executive Director of Mercantile Credit Co. Term of office four years expiring May 1992.
Diana Beale	Advice Worker and Member of the National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux. Term of office four years expiring May 1992
Allan Blake	Associate Dean for Personnel and Resources Business School, Leeds Polytechnic. Term of office five years expiring May 1993.
Hilary Bradley	Barrister. Term of office three years expiring May 1991.
Lyn Devonald	Solicitor. Term of office four years expiring May 1992.
Kenneth Farrow	Barrister and Assistant Recorder. Term of office four years expiring May 1992.
Suzette Harold	Former Managing Director of F International Ltd. Term of office three years expiring May 1991.
Geoffrey Hibbert	JP, former Personnel Director, Shell International Petroleum Co. Term of office three years expiring May 1991.
David Sinker	JP, Chartered Accountant and Chairman of the Leach Group. Term of office four years expiring May 1991.
John Smith	JP, former Personnel Director and Assistant Managing Director, Associated British Ports. Term of office five years expiring May 1993.
Peter Soar	Solicitor. Term of office five years expiring May 1993.
	The Chairman of the Board is paid £21,326 per annum. Mr. Hibbert is paid £12,925 and Mr. Blake £7,109. All other members are paid £14,218 per annum.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his office in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

The Attorney-General: No equipment has been stolen from my office or from the Treasury Solicitor's Department during the last three years. Four screwdrivers with a total value of £1·20 have been stolen from the Serious Fraud Office, and the items listed in the table have been stolen from offices of the Crown prosecution service.

	Approximate value of each item	*Total*
	£	£
6 Video recorders	500	3,000
1 Video camera	1,000	1,000
1 Word processor	1,700	1,700
21 Hand held dictation machines	90	1,890
1 Transcriber	250	250
5 Microwave ovens	150	750
4 Electric fans	25	100
1 Lawn mower	400	400
1 Sactruck	65	65
2 Volumes Oxford English dictionary	50	100
1 Answerphone	90	90
1 Stainless steel sink unit and waste disposal unit	200	200
Central heating radiators	—	1000
1 Coffee maker	60	60
	Total	10,605

Circuit Judges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what consultations he has had with the chief constable of the South Wales police regarding the provision of security for the persons, families and property of circuit judges when resident at Radyr Chain house, Llandrisant road, Cardiff;

(2) what representations he has had regarding the level of security at Radyr Chain house.

The Attorney-General: No building of this name forms part of the Lord Chancellor's estate. The lodgings for High Court judges in Cardiff are at Whitehall, Drysgol road, Radyr.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General what proposals he has to *(a)* review and *(b)* strengthen security at circuit judges' residential accommodation in (i) Cardiff and (ii) elsewhere.

The Attorney-General: No residential accommodation is provided for circuit judges. Security arrangements at the residential accommodation provided for High Court judges in Cardiff and elsewhere are regularly reviewed by officials of the Lord Chancellor's Department, and changes made when these are necessary.

Acts of Parliament

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will make it his policy to include a comma before the year in the citation of Acts of Parliament.

The Attorney-General: No. The practice of including a comma in the citation of an Act serves no useful purpose, and was abandoned in 1962, on the advice of the Statute Law Committee.

Legal Aid

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Attorney-General whether there is a shortage of solicitors prepared to take on legal aid work in any area of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Legal Aid Board, which administers the legal aid system in England and Wales, has received no representations from persons requiring the services of a solicitor who have been unable to obtain those services. The Scottish Legal Aid Board has also received no such representations. Similarly, the position in Northern Ireland is that no such representations have been received.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Attorney-General how many solicitors and companies of solicitors have withdrawn from the legal aid scheme over the past three years.

The Attorney-General: No statistics are available on the identities of solicitors or firms of solicitors undertaking legal aid work at any one time. The Legal Aid Board does, however, publish a figure showing the number of offices receiving payment. For the last three years these were as follows:

	Number
1987-88	11,617
1988-89	11,558
1989-90	11,455

The Legal Aid Board also publishes statistics which show that, despite this, over the past three years the number of legal aid payments made to solicitors has risen.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received concerning people wishing to obtain legal aid because they cannot afford the legal fees but who have been refused legal aid; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor regularly receives representations regarding all aspects of the legal aid system. However, the grant of legal aid is a matter for the Legal Aid Board or the courts. The Lord Chancellor is conducting a review into the financial conditions for legal aid which will also consider how an applicant's means relate to the cost of proceedings.

ENVIRONMENT

Litter Code

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment with regard to the introduction of the litter code under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and his Department's effort to seek the views of local authority representatives, how many local authorities submitted comments on his proposals; what proportion of comments were in favour of his proposals; and if he will make those comments publicly available.

Mr. Trippier: A draft of the code of practice on litter and refuse, which provides guidance on the discharge of

the new duty to ensure that land is kept clear of litter and refuse, was issued for consultation to local authorities and others in February 1990.

Of the 160 local authorities who commented on the draft code, only a handful stated that they were opposed to it. This was, no doubt, due to the fact that the code was drafted in consultation with a code of practice advisory group which comprised representatives of the main local authority associations, statutory transport undertakers, private sector cleansing contractors and property owners. The practicalities of the proposals had therefore already been carefully considered by practitioners, but comments were taken into account in producing the final version of the code which was published on 18 January 1991.

We have no plans, at present, to make any responses to the consultation publicly available.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the withdrawal of urban development corporations and the transfer of powers back to local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Urban development corporations were set up as temporary regeneration agencies with limited lifetimes. No UDC completes its projected lifetime before 1993. We are keeping their lifetimes under review.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each financial year from 1979-80 to 1990-91 the proportion expressed as a percentage of actual local authority spending met be *(a)* central government grant, *(b)* non-domestic ratepayers and *(c)* domestic rate/poll tax.

Mr. Portillo: The information for the English local authorities is as follows:

	Government grants [1] as percentage of local authority expenditure	*Non-domestic rates [2] as percentage of local authority expenditure*	*Domestic rates/ community charges [3] as percentage of local authority expenditure*
1979-80[4]	60	22	17
1980-81[4]	59	23	17
1981-82	56	25	20
1982-83	53	26	21
1983-84	54	26	19
1984-85	54	26	20
1985-86	54	28	21
1986-87	50	28	22
1987-88	49	28	23
1988-89	46	28	24
1989-90	44	28	25
1990-91	42	29	28

[1] For the years 1979-80 to 1989-90 Government grants comprises aggregate Exchequer grant and rate rebate grants. For 1990-91 Government grants is made up of revenue support grant, special grants, specific grants in aggregate external finance community charge benefits, and transitional relief grant.

[2] Net of rate rebates.

[3] Net of rate rebates for the years 1979-80 to 1989-90. Net of community charge benefits and transitional relief in 1990-91.

[4] England and Wales.

Cheshire Structure Plan

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his decisions in respect of the Cheshire structure plan.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend intends to announce his final decision on the Cheshire structure plan in the summer. He will consult on his proposed modifications in the spring.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the metropolitan councils, and London boroughs, in England in ranking order of their indebtedness, in the last year for which figures are available, with the figures for *(a)* their debt, *(b)* the level of that year's debt service charge, *(c)* their population, *(d)*, *(a)* divided by *(c)* and *(e)*, *(b)* divided by *(c)*; and if he will give corresponding figures for five, 10 and 15 years ago.

Mr. Key: I have arranged for the available information to be laid in the Library of the House.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent directions he has given to the London Docklands development corporation on policy changes envisaged for that body; and what announcement he will be making concerning the role and appointment of its chief executive,.

Mr. Key: The Secretary of State has issued no statutory directions to the London Docklands development corporation. The LDDC keeps its policies and programmes under constant review, as reflected in its corporate plan, and holds regular discussions with Ministers during that process. The Secretary of State welcomes the LDDC board's decision to appoint Mr. Eric Sorensen as their new chief executive. Mr. Sorensen's role will be determined by the board.

County Hall, London

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the future disposal of county hall, London SE1.

Mr. Key: The public inquiry into the relevant planning applications was reopened on 15 January and remains to be concluded. It is for the London residuary body to decide on the timing of the disposal of county hall in the light of the planning position.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require that manufacturers prove substances are not environmentally hazardous prior to production and disposal.

Mr. Baldry: There are adequate powers in existing legislation to require manufactuers to obtain information about potentially hazardous substances and to assess their effects on the environment. The Notification of New Substances Regulations 1982 require manufacturers or importers to provide information about potential hazards to the environment before they place substances on the market for the first time. Section 142 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 gives the Secretary of State powers to require manufacturers to obtain information about the properties of hazardous substances in order to assess their potential for causing pollution of the environment or harm to human health. In addition there are general duties under the relevant legislation not to discharge polluting substances to air or water or to dispose of them to land without the appropriate authorisation.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to enforce the disposal and control of waste substances, created locally, within that locality.

Mr. Baldry: It is not practicable to enforce local disposal. All wastes must be disposed of at suitably licensed facilities and particularly difficult wastes sometimes have to travel some distance to the nearest specialist facility equipped to dispose of them safely.

The Department is, however, currently encouraging authorities to aim for regional self sufficiency in waste disposal. To this end we have asked authorities to form voluntary regional groupings to provide better strategic planning for disposal, a uniform approach to licensing and enforcement and more effective deployment of specialist resources across authorities.

We expect these arrangments to be in place by 1 April. The Secretary of State has reserve powers in section 31 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to set up statutory regional waste regulation authorities where suitable voluntary arrangements have not been made.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many licensed waste disposal facilities are situated *(a)* within the United Kingdom, *(b)* in Yorkshire and Humberside and *(c)* within West Yorkshire;

(2) how many waste disposal inspections were carried out in 1989 and 1990; and how frequently, on average, individual waste disposal premises are inspected;

(3) how many inspectors are employed to monitor the activities of licensed waste disposal installations within the United Kingdom; and if he will quantify these in terms of numbers of inspectors per installation licensed;

(4) if he will increase the number of pollution inspectors to reflect the increased power of inspectors to monitor the activities of licensed waste disposal facilities;

(5) if he will introduce legislation to replace Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution guidelines, as conditions for the licensing of waste disposal facilities within the United Kingdom, with statutory regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: It is the responsibility of waste disposal authorities to issue waste disposal licences and to ensure that any conditions of the licences are met. The information on numbers of sites, inspectors, and frequency of visits is not, therefore, available. However, as part of the implementation of part II of the Environmental Protection Act, the Secretary of State will be issuing statutory guidance to waste regulation authorities over the discharge of their functions in relation to licences. This guidance will largely be a revision of the existing waste management paper No. 4 "The Licensing of Waste Facilities".

Dumplington Shopping Centre

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department first received an application to build a regional shopping centre at Dumplington, Trafford park, Manchester; and when he anticipates being in a position to announce his decision.

Mr. Yeo: A planning appeal for this scheme was made in November 1986. Two subsequent applications were called-in during 1987. I cannot yet forecast when it will be possible to decide them. I will write to interested parties as soon as I can.

Private Water Supply

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional resources and help he is offering to local authorities to help them fulfil the duties and responsibilities in the proposed regulations on the monitoring of private water supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Most of the expenditure incurred by local authorities as a consequence of the proposed regulations on private water supplies will relate to the sampling and analysis of the supplies. The proposals provide for local authorities to recover through charges the costs they will incur for sampling and analysis at the prescribed frequencies. The additional costs to local authorities of carrying out their enforcement activities under section 57 of the Water Act 1989 were taken into account in the increase in total standard spending which we have allowed for in next year's revenue support grant settlement.

Once the Private Water Supplies Regulations have been made, a departmental circular will be issued to provide advice and assistance to local authorities in carrying out their functions in relation to private water supplies. A draft of this circular forms part of the consultation paper recently published. Guidance to local authorities will also be available from the drinking water inspectorate in the form of a technical booklet.

Homelessness

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many families with dependent children were accepted as homeless in 1990, or at the nearest available date;

(2) how many families with dependent children, accepted as homeless by their local authority, were placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in 1990 or at the nearest available date; and if he will express the answer in terms of the total number for England and the number for each local authority;

(3) what was the average length of stay for families with dependent children, who were accepted as homeless by the local authority, and placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, in 1990 or at the nearest available date; and if he will express the answer in terms of the average length of stay for England and for each local authority.

Sir George Young: Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure accommodation for households who have been found homeless, or threatened with homelessness, and in priority need, under part III of the Housing Act 1985. Information is reported quarterly to the Department.

In 1989-90 local authorities accepted and found accommodation for some 80,000 households with dependent children. The information provided does not indentify families with dependent children placed in bed and breakfast accommodation nor the average length of stay and my Department has no estimates. The latest estimates for England for the total number of homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation, for the end of September 1990, appear in table 4(a) of "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England. Results for the third quarter 1990. Supplementary Tables", a copy of which is in the Library. Available information for individual local authorities appears in table 7 of the same document.

Water Meters

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the next report of the compulsory water meter trials to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The second interim report on the national water metering trials was published by the water industry last July and covered the installation phase of the trials. A final report covering other aspects of the trials will be published after they have been completed. This will not be until 1993.

Community Charge

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give his estimate of the numbers of extra staff employed by local councils due to the introduction of the community charge.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) to a question by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 16 January 1991, at columns *498-99*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Community Charge

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as to the result of the discussions between his noble Friend Lord Ferrers and the chief constable of the West Midlands, other members of a police delegation and the Association of Metropolitan authorities, held on 18 December, to discuss their financial concerns about the effects of plans to cap the community charge in their areas.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on 7 February at column *236*.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The following equipment has been reported as stolen and written off as such in the appropriation account:

1988-89	£
Gardening equipment	890
Farm equipment	8,380
Video recorder	193
Radio	257
Projection screen	100
Video recorder and Microwave oven	470

1989-90	£
Gardening equipment	1,780
Farm equipment	10,996
Bicycles	353

1990-91	£
Gardening equipment	1,006

The following equipment is thought to have been but has not yet been formally entered on the losses register for the purposes of the appropriation account:

1989-90	£
Desktop computer	1,450
Video recorder	290

Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parliamentary constituencies there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Scotland.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of parliamentary constituencies is currently as follows:

England 523; Wales 38; Scotland 72 and Northern Ireland 17.

The number of constituencies in England will be increased to 524 at the next general election.

NATIONAL FINANCE

National Expenditure

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by central and local government in the last financial year; what is the estimated figure for the current year; and by how much income tax requires to be raised to yield the equivalent sums.

Mr. Mellor: The latest information on expenditure by central and local government was published in the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement" —Cm 1520. The figures requested, consistent with the supplement, are as follows:—

	£ million	
	1989-90	*1990-91*
Central government[1]		
Expenditure other than debt interest	127,521	141,214
Debt interest	17,823	[2]17,800
Total	145,344	[2]159,000
Local authorities[3]		
Expenditure other than debt interest	47,970	52,086
Debt interest	4,919	[2]5,200
Total	52,889	[2]57,300

[1] Including the financing requirements of public corporations (other than nationalised industries).
[2] Rounded to the nearest £100 million.
[3] Includes expenditure financed by support provided by central government (eg revenue support grant) and expenditure which local authorities finance for themselves (eg from community charge, capital receipts).

A ready reckoner for the revenue effects of tax changes was published table 4.5 of the autumn statement.

Departmental Purchasing

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many Departments to date have established or expanded purchasing units purchasing goods formerly bought on their behalf by the Crown Suppliers; and what are the total annual running costs of those units;

(2) how many Departments to date have established units purchasing services formerly provided to them by the Property Services Agency; and what are the total annual running costs of those units.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The following items of equipment are noted as having been stolen from Her Majesty's Treasury in the last three years:
seven transponders, 1987—value £1,400.
computer accessories and document box, 1987—value £2,126·91.
Video recorder, 1988—value £285·89.
electroholm screen, 1988—value £292·35.
ICL keyboard, 1990—value £126.

Endangered Species

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions were entered as a result of articles relating to rare and endangered species seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the year to 31 March 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* During the year in question four prosecutions, involving five persons, were instituted under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, for attempted evasion of the endangered species restrictions. All related to live creatures or plants, rather than to articles derived from them.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *678*, if he will give details of the 1,546 live animals and birds seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the year to 31 March 1990; and what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the disposal of such creatures.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* The total of 1,546 live animals and birds was made up of the following categories:

Category	*Number seized*
Monkeys	8
Wild feline	1
Snakes	171
Tortoises	48
Turtles	90
Lizards	571
Frogs	40
Toads	50
Salamanders	12
Parrots	22
Other birds	533

As to disposal of such creatures, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 21 July 1990 at column *417*. Policy in this area remains unchanged.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Latin America

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new policies Her Majesty's Government are proposing for the improvement of co-operation with the democratic Latin American Governments in their efforts to *(a)* consolidate democracy, *(b)* restore or improve freedoms, *(c)* promote social justice and *(d)* gain better access to the EC markets.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We take every opportunity to strengthen our excellent relations with Latin American countries, encourage respect for democratic freedoms and human rights and foster trade and investment. In allocating development aid, we increasingly apply the good government criteria outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth

Affairs in his speech to the Overseas Development Institute on 6 June 1990. We are also working for an early and successful conclusion of the GATT round.

Hong Kong

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he has made to safeguard the position after 1999 of Catholics in Hong Kong who do not join the Patriotic Chinese Church; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Sino-British joint declaration on the future of Hong Kong, the Basic Law for the Hong Kong special administrative region and the international covenant on civil and political rights, which will continue to apply to Hong Kong after 1997, all make provision for the continuation of freedom of religious belief and practice in Hong Kong after 1997.

Ex-prisoners of War

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have received from British ex-prisoners of war about their treatment while working for I.G. Farben during the second world war.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have received a number of representations. Some cases of mistreatment by individuals were investigated after the War with a view to war crimes proceedings, but, as a general matter, we do not consider that treatment of prisoners of war who worked for I.G. Farben can be shown to have been contrary to the 1929 Geneva convention. There is no basis to raise this matter with the German authorities.

China

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of the People's Republic of China regarding the imprisonment of Catholics at Baoding and Yixian in Hebei province.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are seeking details of the specific cases referred to by the hon. Member. We have raised our concerns over the treatment of Catholics in China on a number of occasions. Together with our European partners, we made representations about the imprisonment of Catholics in China in February 1990. My hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, also raised this with the Chinese Government during his visit to Peking in July.

Third Geneva Convention

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there are any conditions under which a signatory to the third Geneva convention may be permitted to refuse to observe any or all of its obligations under that convention.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The third Geneva convention does not have a provision for derogation and is binding on all its parties, which include Iraq.

The Gulf

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussion he has had with the Government of Jordan about bombing of the Iraq-Jordan highway.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received reports from the Jordanian Government of bombing incidents on the highway in late January.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government with regard to that part of United Nations Security Council resolution 678 referring to the restoration of international peace and security as being applicable to a wider area than that covered by Arab Gulf states.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 30 January at column *525*. Security Council resolution 678 is concerned with the illegal Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait and measures taken to restore international peace and security in that area.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what approach he has received from the Iranian Government about their peace plans for the Gulf; and what response he has sent.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iranian Government are reported to have put forward to Iraq certain suggestions for achieving a peaceful solution to the current crisis. The details have not been disclosed, but we would support any proposal based on a complete Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and full compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on surveys conducted by the United Nations, or any international body of which the United Kingdom is a member, into the efficacy of sanctions against Iraq up to 16 January.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 17 December to the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young), at column *71*. The UN has not published any survey on the efficacy of sanctions against Iraq up to 16 January. We are not aware of any such survey published by other international organisations to which we belong.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to propose the permanent sitting of the United Nations during the Gulf war so that all peace proposals can be examined on the international stage.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As required under article 28 of the charter, the UN Security Council is so organised as to enable it to function continuously.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications he has received from the United Nations Secretary-General about bombing of vehicles on the main Iraq-Jordan highway; and what response he has made.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received no communications from the UN Secretary-General on this subject.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on statements made by or reports issued from United Nations senior officials or its offices, as to the level of casualties, military and/or civilian, in Iraq and Kuwait.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no information on casualty levels in Iraq or Kuwait from United Nations sources. The Amnesty International report published in December describes conditions and civilian casualties in Kuwait under Iraqi occupation.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take action to place the costs of the Gulf war to individual members of the European Community to joint European account in relation to the dependence of individual Community members on Gulf oil.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

AEA Fuel Services

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West on 21 January 1991 at column *50*, if the United Kingdomn embassy in Oslo promoted any services offered by the United Kingdom AEA Fuel Services.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: UKAEA Dounreay has sought and received from the British embassy in Oslo advice on marketing services relating to offshore oil installations, but the embassy has not been engaged in the promotion of its services.

Israel

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Israel about the curfew imposed upon Palestinians in the west bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem; and what replies he has received.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what immediate action he intends to ensure that Israel removes the curfew currently imposed on the Palestinians of the west bank and Gaza strip.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Twelve have agreed to make an early demarche to the Israeli authorities to press for an easing of the curfew. Meanwhile, we understand that the Israelis are taking steps to ease the curfew.

Phnom Penh

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials from his Department visited Phnom Penh between 1981 and 1990 inclusive; and if he will give the dates of the visits in each case.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No Foreign and Commonwealth Minister visited Phnom Penh between 1981 and 1990. Officials from the British embassy in Bangkok and the ODA have twice visited Phnom Penh from 8 to 16 December 1989 and from 31 August to 6 September 1990.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The following items of equipment have been reported stolen from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the past three years:

	£ each	*£*
Two desk fans	20·00	40·00
Two answer phones	60·83	121·66
Two telephones from lifts	7·00	14·00
One tape recorder	—	47·50
Two office cleaning machines	250·00	500·00
Total	—	723·16

Ambassadors

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the number of Her Majesty's ambassadors currently in post who do not come from the ranks of career diplomats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are currently no ambassadors or high commissioners who are other than career members of Her Majesty's diplomatic service.

Beirut

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made this year concerning the Christian community in Beirut.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have frequently urged the Lebanese Government to pursue a policy of peace and reconciliation. Further bloodshed will only cause more suffering.

Middle East

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he intends to take through the United Nations to ensure that any long-term plans to make the middle east a region free from weapons of mass destruction would apply to Israel in the same way as they would to Arab countries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Any middle east zone free from weapons of mass destruction would by definition have to include Israel as well as Arab states. President Mubarak proposed such a zone in 1990. We understand that the Egyptians are considering how to take their initiative forward. We would look carefully at any further proposals. In the meantime, we shall continue to pursue controls on nuclear and other sensitive technologies through the respective international fora.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to introduce a know-how programme for middle east states,

similar to that available to Poland and other central and eastern European states, following the conclusion of hostilities in the Gulf war.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government already have technical co-operation programmes under the overseas aid programme providing know how to a number of middle east states.

Ethiopia

Mr. Aitken: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will specify the nature of the economic co-operation with Ethiopia which the Minister for Overseas Development discussed in Addis Ababa with President Mengistu last month.

Mrs. Chalker: I had discussions with Ethiopian Ministers about their economic reform programme. I urged them to reach full agreement with the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, since this will be necessary in order to attract additional flows of development aid from the international community. I drew attention to the fact that the United Kingdom makes its contribution to Ethiopia's development through our participation in the European Community's development programme.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to increase the funding of the Commonwealth Development Corporation during 1991.

Mrs. Chalker: No final decision has yet been taken on the level of funding of the Commonwealth Development Corporation for 1991-92.

Third World Debt

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at which conferences dealing with third world debt reduction he was represented during 1989 and 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: The Secretary of State attended the Houston economic summit in 1990. Sir Geoffrey Howe as Secretary of State attended the Paris economic summit in 1989. The permanent secretary of the Overseas Development Administration was a member of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's delegation for the 1989 and 1990 annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and World bank, and the six-monthly meetings of their interim and development committees. He also attended the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meetings in Jamaica in 1989 and in Trinidad in 1990, where Britain launched new proposals on reducing the official debt of the poorest countries. I have attended a number of international gatherings at which debt has been discussed, including the United Nations special session on economic recovery and development in April 1990.

Bilateral Aid

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average level of per capita aid to *(a)* former British colonies and *(b)* other nations.

Mrs. Chalker: The average level of British bilateral aid per capita to former British colonies in 1989 was £0·50 and to other developing countries £0·09.

African Refugees

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department intends to provide for African refugees during 1991.

Mrs. Chalker: The aid programme is managed in a way that allows us to respond quickly to refugee needs as they arise.

Foreign Aid

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total level of British overseas aid in each of the past five years at constant prices.

Mrs. Chalker: The level of total United Kingdom gross public expenditure on aid in each of the last five years at constant prices was:

Year	*£,000 Constant 1989 prices*
1985	1,641,558
1986	1,616,168
1987	1,476,461
1988	1,780,848
1989	1,787,863

TRANSPORT

European Community (Representations)

11. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what areas there have been joint approaches by his Department and Irish Government officials to the European Community on transport matters.

Mr. Rifkind: There have been no such approaches, but I and my Department keep in close contact with Irish colleagues on all matters of common transport interest.

Anglo-Scottish Air Services

12. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to transfer any of the existing Anglo-Scottish air services which operate in and out of Heathrow to any other airport in the south-east of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

Vehicle Emissions

13. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to reduce vehicle emissions.

Mr. Chope: From the end of 1992, all new cars will have to comply with strict new Community standards to control their emissions. We also intend to introduce an emissions check in the MOT test later this year.

The Government are also seeking to persuade the Community to adopt the strict US 1994 standards for emissions from trucks and buses.

A38

14. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to conclude his investigations into the future status of the A38 between Exeter and Plymouth.

Mr. Chope: Consultants have still to be appointed for the assessment of the needs of the A38 between Exeter and Plymouth which was announced in "Roads for Prosperity".

The assessment is likely to take about 12 months. Once it is complete, further consideration can be given to the need for and form of any improvement scheme.

Waterloo Station (Suburban Services)

15. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent opportunities he has taken to travel officially on Network SouthEast's suburban commuter lines services into or from Waterloo station.

Mr. Freeman: I recently travelled with my hon. Friend on Network SouthEast services into Waterloo to see at first hand travelling conditions and to identify problems that commuters experience on these lines.

Air Traffic

16. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the air traffic distribution rules.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend met the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority on 4 February; the air traffic distribution rules were not discussed.

Second Severn Crossing

17. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is proposing to visit the site for the second Severn crossing.

Mr. Freeman: I have already visited the site proposed for the English landfall of the bridge.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the recent meeting between his officials, representatives of Laing GMT, and English Stones Fishery Partnership regarding compensation for disturbance of fishing rights concomitant upon the construction of the second Severn crossing.

Mr. Freeman: A meeting has been held with the English Stones Fishery Partnership concerning the possible effects of the proposed second Severn bridge on the partnership's fishing rights. The partnership has now deposited a petition against the Severn Bridges Bill. It will now be for the Select Committee to consider that petition in the normal way.

Channel Tunnel

18. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total investment by British Rail in improved rail services which will be in place for the proposed opening of the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail plans to invest £1·4 billion to enable international passenger and freight services to begin when the tunnel opens. However, as my right hon. and learned Friend told my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 5 December, at column *121*, it is unlikely that the trains for the daytime north of London through passenger services will be ready until 1994.

Airport Security

19. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his discussions on the current level of security at British airports.

Mr. McLoughlin: There is nothing I can add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 29 January at column *446*.

Docklands Light Railway

20. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the future ownership of the docklands light railway; and if he has given any direction to London Regional Transport in respect of its disposal.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans to change the ownership of the docklands light railway and no direction has been given to London Regional Transport in respect of its disposal.

Train Doors

21. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many young people have been injured or killed in accidents caused by falling from the doors of moving trains for each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: There have been some 270 casualties in accidents involving people falling from trains in the last five years, including provisional figures for 1990. Her Majesty's railway inspectorate does not keep separate records of accidents involving young people.

Greater Manchester Relief Road

22. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to release the details he has received of a proposed alternative route for the Greater Manchester northern and western relief road.

Mr. Chope: This route is still at the initial stages of assessment. If it proves to be a viable proposition, details will be released when public consultation takes place. I cannot say yet when that will be.

British Rail (Disabled Access)

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to discuss station access for the disabled when he next meets the chairman of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: The decision whether to improve access to stations lies with British Rail. It is for BR to design and plan improvements with the help of its disability adviser, and to judge any proposals against other schemes and the resources available.

Freight Services

24. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received any proposals from British Rail about additional investment in freight services.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's 1990 plan includes some £900 million investment in freight over the period 1990-91 to 1994-95. Since last spring, we have given approval for BR to invest over £120 million in new wagons and locomotives and the electrification of the line from Tonbridge to Redhill. There are currently no outstanding investment cases for rail freight investment with the Department.

Scottish Rail Links (Electrification)

25. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals his Department has received from ScotRail for the electrification of rail links within Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has received no such proposals from the British Railways Board. I understand that ScotRail is considering a number of possibilities.

M66

26. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with North West Water about the cost of the M66 motorway over Audenshaw reservoir No. 3; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: A number of discussions have been held with North West Water, because construction of the M66 motorway will reduce the storage capacity of Audenshaw reservoir No. 3. A new pipeline from the Goyt valley is to be provided as a replacement facility. The reasonable costs of providing the pipeline will be met by the Department.

Roadworks (Compensation)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to bring forward proposals to compensate small businesses affected by roadworks.

Mr. Chope: No. The legislation governing compulsory purchase and compensation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Compensation is already payable at full market value of property acquired. In addition, there are payments for disturbance, and for depreciation when premises are harmed by the effects of a road scheme.

School Buses (Seat Belts)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce legislation for the compulsory use of seat belts in school buses.

Mr. Chope: We shall consider the question of mandatory wearing seat belts in school buses once there is a requirement for seat belts to be fitted. We are not free to introduce such a requirement nationally, but are pressing the EC to bring forward proposals to enable us to do so.

Motor Cyclists (Training Certificates)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether certificates for motor cyclists who have completed basic training are currently available for issue at the approved Berwick, Belford and Alnwick centres; whether he has any plans to discontinue training at Alnwick; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Civil Aviation Authority

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend meets the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Historic Counties

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost to his Department of erecting boundary signs on main roads designating the boundaries of historic counties which are no longer effective.

Mr. Chope: I regret that information on the numbers of main roads crossing the borders of historic counties and on the size and design of possible boundary signs could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Railway Safety

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received British Rail's safety plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The British Railways Board has submitted its safety plan to me today. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

I welcome the board's plan, which sets out the board's safety policy and objectives and the wide range of initiatives that are already under way. These include new safety management systems, improved training, investment in new equipment and changes in working methods. The plan is a comprehensive and forward-looking document. It demonstrates the high level of commitment and of resources being devoted, throughout British Rail, to running a safe railway. I hope that the plan will increase public awareness of this enormous effort, and reassure rail users.

Railway accidents are rare and rail remains one of the safest modes of transport. Building on this, the board is committed to maintaining and improving this enviable safety record.

The initiatives in the plan will be taken into account in BR's estimates of future safety expenditure. We have endorsed in full both BR's expenditure of £70 million on additional safety measures in 1990-91, and its planned expenditure of some £330 million over the next three years. BR knows that there is no financial constraint on necessary and cost-effective safety expenditure.

I have written to Dr. Cullen, the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, seeking the commission's view on the safety plan.

A2 Roadworks

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the cost of all roadworks undertaken on that stretch of the A2 roadway between Falconwood cemetery, Eltham and Pepper Hill, Swanscombe, from November 1984 to date; if he will adjust costs to reflect current prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The cost of major roadworks undertaken since the beginning of November 1984 on the A2 between Falconwood cemetery, Eltham and Pepper Hill, Swanscombe, adjusted to reflect current prices and including the accepted tender prices for works at present in hand in the London borough of Bexley and Kent, is £16·1 million approximately. This figure comprises £10·9 million for major maintenance and, in Kent, £5·2 million for hard shoulder provision forming part of the A2 London boundary-M2 improvement scheme.

Ports

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* give full details of Government grants to ports and *(b)* name the ports which received them in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Port modernisaton grants under section 12 of the Harbours Act 1964 were discontinued in 1971, and this provision was repealed by the Transport Act 1981. The Port of London (Financial Assistance) Act 1980 provided for grants to enable the Port of London Authority to reduce its labour force and restore the profitability of its undertaking. That Act was replaced by the Ports (Financial Assistance) Act 1981 which applied also to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. From 3 July 1989, these grants have been superseded by Government contributions under the dock work compensation payment scheme. Amounts granted over the 10-year period were as follows:

£ million

	PLA	*MDHC*
1980-81	23·5	—
1981-82	21·8	25·8
1982-83	31·8	56·3
1983-84	35·4	40·5
1984-85	24·4	9·4
1985-86	55·7	9·5
1986-87	20·7	4·5
1987-88	6·8	8·6
1988-89	1·5	2·9
1989-90	—	—

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* name those ports which have received loans under the Harbour Loans Act 1972 or subsequent legislation, *(b)* give full details of those loans and *(c)* list which of those loans (i) have been repaid in full (ii) have been written off and (iii) are outstanding.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information is not readily available on loans that were paid off several years ago. The three last outstanding loans under the 1972 Act, made to the Clyde port authority in 1984 and 1985 and totalling £3·293 million, were paid off in 1989. Loans were also made under the Ports (Financial Assistance) Act 1981 as follows:

	Year	*£ million*
Port of London Authority	1982	[1]3·0
	1983	[1]1·9
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company	1982	[2]4·13

[1] Balance outstanding.
[2] £1·5 million written off May 1989; balance paid off.

A69

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the road junctions on the A69 between Newcastle and Carlisle which are being considered for safety improvement measures.

Mr. Chope: Two schemes are included in the 1991-92 regional programme. They are the Bush Bends to Haydon Bridge improvement, Northumberland and Corby cross-roads improvement, Cumbria.

Fishing Vessels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any proposals to amend the rules and regulations governing the occupational safety of the crews of United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels.

Mr. McLoughlin: Consultation recently began with the industry on ways of extending United Kingdom occupational safety provisions for fishermen in line with those for people in other occupations and with forthcoming European Community requirements.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to carry out the recommendations of the Civil Aviation Authority regarding greater access to Heathrow airport.

Mr. Rifkind: I am considering the authority's advice and hope to announce a decision before long.

M40

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effect the recent opening of the M40 motorway extension has had on traffic flow on the M1 motorway.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* So far the available figures show that traffic flows on the M1 have been reduced by between 4,000 and 11,000 vehicles per week day. But these are initial counts only.

WALES

Thyroid Cancer

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of thyroid cancer have been recorded in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many deaths.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The latest available information for usual residents of Wales—all ages, male and female—is as follows:

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases of thyroid cancer[1]

Year	Number
1982	41
1983	57
1984	50
1985	65
1986	47

Number of deaths from thyroid cancer[1 2]

Year	Number
1982	18
1983	31
1984	15
1985	20
1986	13
1987	31
1988	20
1989	14

[1] Malignant neoplasm of thyroid gland: ICD9 Code 193.
[2] *Source:* Office of Population Census and Survey.

Health Promotion Authority

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the budget of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Subject to parliamentary approval, in 1991-92 a total of £2·472 million will be made available for the authority's core allocation and a further £340,000 will be allocated for new projects. An additional £28,000 will be available as a further earmarked reserve to meet the cost of the authority's contribution to the family planning information service. The allocation will be conditional upon satisfactory completion of annual performance review. It represents a further and substantial commitment of resources to the authority. Allocations for 1992-93 and 1993-94 have not yet been decided.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the speech made on 1 February by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales on the subject of housing.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I made no speech about housing on 1 February.

Secure Accommodation (Juveniles)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been spent by local authorities in Wales on *(a)* secure accommodation within Wales and *(b)* secure accommodation outside Wales for alleged juvenile offenders on remand in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much he estimates local authorities in Wales will need to spend *(a)* in terms of capital and *(b)* in terms of annual revenue expenditure to meet the requirements for secure accommodation for the remand of alleged juvenile offenders as a result of the Government's proposals of 4 February.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The general implications of the proposals for Welsh authorities are being taken into account in our review of secure care and we shall be consulting local authorities on this matter.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell To ask the Secretary of State or Wales if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. David Hunt: Details of equipment stolen from the Department during the last three financial years are set out in the tables.

	£
Financial year 1987-88	
Twelve plastic name settings	94·50
Tape dispenser	5·11
Twenty-one telephones	508·62
Departmental car	1,700·00
	2,308·23
Financial year 1988-89	
Three flags	225·00
Tools	119·22
Union Jack Flag	41·40
Four telephones	112·00
	497·62
Financial year 1989-90	
Ladder	169·05
Roadwork signs	4,834·68
	5,003·73

Health Service

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what moneys have been allocated to district health authorities in Wales under the waiting times initiative to tackle problematic waiting lists referred to in objective 45 of the Welsh Office NHS directorate agenda for action; and what is the estimated cost of implementing the proposals for service improvement, in objectives 45 to 54;

(2) what action he has taken to ensure a greater concern and sensitivity to consumers' needs referred to in objectives 46, 53, 54, in the Welsh Office NHS directorate agenda for action; and what is the budgeted cost for 1991 and 1992 of objectives 32 to 35, outlining the need for a more integrated information system within each district;

(3) if he will give details of the outcome of his Office's objective of developing a pricing policy for Welsh health common services authorities to cover overheads and allow for development of consultancy expertise as cited in objective 38 of the Welsh Office NHS directorate agenda for action; and what is the budgeted cost for 1991 and 1992;

(4) which devised business action plans for each of the Welsh health common services authorities referred to in objective 37, page 52, of the Welsh Office NHS directorate agenda for action have been identified to make best use of staff and technical resources; and what are the annual budgets in 1991 and 1992 for each of the Welsh health common services authorities referred to;

(5) if he will give the estimated cost, in 1990-91 and 1991-92, of implementing the proposals for rationalising the supplies and stores objectives listed in the Welsh Office NHS directorate agenda for action; and what are the estimated costs, by area health authority in Wales in 1991 and 1992, of objectives 41, 42, 43 and 44, on schemes for health promotion;

(6) what will be the cost of *(a)* the establishment of an all-Wales telecommunications network referred to in objective 34 and *(b)* implementing objectives 36 to 40, listed in pages 52 and 53 of the Welsh Office NHS directorate agenda for action, outlining various schemes for general management modifications.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what budget has been allocated in 1991-92 to those agencies in Wales charged with developing an appropriate and consistent approach to health promotion and health promotion targets, referred to in objectives 41, 43 and 44 of the Welsh Office national health service directorate agenda for action.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In respect of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him earlier today. In respect of district health authorities I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 30 January 1991, at columns *515-17*.

The 1991-92 administration revenue allocations for family health services authorities will be announced as soon as possible.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the budgeted cost of the establishment of goal setting machinery for promotion and prevention, referred to in objective 42 of the Welsh Office national health service directorate agenda for action in 1990-91.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not available centrally.

Homelessness

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average length of stay for families with dependent children, who were accepted as homeless by their local authority and placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, in 1990 or at the nearest available date; and if he will express the answer in terms of the average length of stay for Wales and for each local authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not centrally available.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many families with dependent children were accepted as homeless in 1990 or at the nearest available date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A total of 4,850 households with dependent children were accepted as homeless during the financial year 1989-90.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many families with dependent children, accepted as homeless by their local authorities, were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation in 1990 or at the nearest available date; and if he will expand the answer in terms of the total number for Wales and the number for each local authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is given for the financial year 1989-90 in the table:

Households with dependent children accepted as homeless and placed in bed and breakfast accommodation 1989-90

	Number
Aberconwy	20
Alyn and Deeside	5
Brecknock	1
Cardiff	404
Carmarthen	1
Ceredigion	8
Colwyn	1
Delyn	18
Dinefwr	16
Islwyn	9
Llanelli	39
Meirionnydd	3
Monmouth	2
Neath	6
Newport	31
Ogwr	5
Port Talbot	3
Preseli Pembrokeshire	30
Radnorshire	2
Rhondda	2
Rhuddlan	2
Rhymney Valley	20
South Pembrokeshire	2
Swansea	2
Taff-Ely	3
Torfaen	10
Vale of Glamorgan	7
Wrexham Maelor	15
Ynys Môn	1
Wales	688

NHS Land and Property

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest estimated revenues, by district health authority, for sale of NHS land and property in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* Taking into account historical performance and delivering receipts within forecast, the latest estimate of receipts from the sale of surplus NHS land and property in Wales for 1990-91 and 1991-92 is £5 million and £7 million respectively. A reliable estimate by individual DHA is not possible given the unertainties associated with the disposal of property.

Higher Education

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to provide transitional funding before 1 April 1992 to higher education courses at five Welsh higher education colleges so as to provide for direct funding for those courses threatened with closure in the academic year 1991-92.

Sir Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* The local authority higher education institutions will receive their funding from within local authority provision for 1991-92—in the main through the higher education

quantum. We have accepted the advice received from the Wales Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education on the programmes to be funded from the HE quantum in 1991-92.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Books and Equipment

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the 10 local education authorities with the lowest expenditure per pupil on books and equipment; and what is the average local authority expenditure on books and equipment.

Mr. Fallon: The table lists the 10 local education authorities with the lowest expenditure per pupil on books and equipment in 1988-89, the latest year for which information is available. Average local authority expenditure on books and equipment in 1988-89 was £54 per pupil.

Expenditure per pupil on books and equipment—1988-89

LEA	*£*
Tameside	35
Birmingham	34
Merton	34
Barnsley	32
Avon	31
Leeds	22
Lincolnshire	22
St. Helens	22
Cleveland	21
Sheffield	17

Notes:
1. The figures are based on LEA returns to DOE and pupil number returns to DES.
2. The figures cover spending on books and equipment in nursery, primary and secondary schools.

Kent Education Department

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total revenue budget for Kent county council education department for 1990-91.

Mr. Fallon: The 1990-91 education budget for Kent local education authority is estimated at £432·3 million. This estimate is based on Kent county council's 1990-91 budget return to the Department of the Environment submitted in May 1990 and is on a similar basis to the education component of its 1990-91 standard spending assessment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was *(a)* the bid and *(b)* the capital allocation to Kent county council education department for 1989-90.

Mr. Fallon: For 1989-90, Kent county council submitted a bid for an education capital allocation of £24·492 million and was given an allocation of £8·610 million.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the standard spending assessment for Kent county council education department for 1990-91.

Mr. Fallon: The education component of Kent county council's 1990-91 standard spending assessment is £456·6 million.

Education Statistics, Leeds

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money was spent on primary and secondary schools in Leeds in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Fallon: The available data are as follows:

(£000's)

Leeds	*1979-80*	*1988-89*
Nursery and primary	27,835	56,652
Secondary	35,929	83,135

Notes to table:
1. The figures are taken from Leeds' expenditure returns to DOE and cover net institutional expenditure. They include the costs of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. They do not include the cost of school meals, central administration, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.
2. All figures quoted are in cash terms.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the secondary school population in Leeds in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested for Leeds local education authority is as follows:

	Pupils in maintained secondary schools[1]
January 1979	73,747
January 1990	50,777

[1] Includes middle schools deemed secondary.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money in real terms was spent on average on each child attending state primary and secondary schools in Leeds in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Fallon: Leeds spent £480 per nursery and primary pupil in 1979-80 and £1,155 in 1988-89, the latest year for which figures are available. It spent £490 per secondary pupil in 1979-80 and £1,545 in 1988-89. At 1988-89 prices those figures are £905 and £1,155 respectively for nursery and primary schools, and £920 and £1,545 respectively for secondary schools.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much Leeds education authority spent on books and equipment per pupil in 1987-88 and 1988-89; what is the estimated expenditure for 1990-91; and what is the comparable average expenditure for metropolitan districts over the same period.

Mr. Fallon: Leeds spent £19 per pupil on books and equipment in 1987-88 and £22 per pupil in 1988-89. The comparable average figures for metropolitan districts are £41 per pupil in 1987-88 on books and equipment and £48 in 1988-89. Estimated figures for 1990-91 are not available.

Pupil:Teacher Ratios

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the pupil:teacher ratio in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Leeds in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested for Leeds local education authority is as follows:

	Pupil: teacher ratio	
	Primary	*Secondary*
January 1979	24·6	17·8
January 1990	19·4	14·8

Iraqi Students

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will indicate the income derived from postgraduate courses of study by Iraqi students in each year from 1981 to 1990 inclusive; and what proportion of these amounts were provided from grants or loans from the Government of Iraq.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Fees for overseas students are set by institutions. They are expected to meet the full cost of the provision made, but details of the actual fees charged are not collected by the Department. However, on the basis of the minimum fee levels recommended by institutions' representative bodies for different types of courses, the Department's estimate is that the total fee income from the numbers of Iraqi postgraduate students in British institutions in the 10 academic years 1980-81 to 1989-90 —details of which were provided at column *372* on 14 January in response to an earlier question from the hon. Member—was in the region of £35 million to £40 million. The Department does not collect information about the sources of individual students' funding.

Licensed Teachers

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the annual cost per trainee teacher of the licensed teacher scheme, disaggregated into (i) payment to licensee, (ii) payment to mentor teacher and (iii) additional expenditure incurred in paying for other teachers to cover mentors' usual teaching commitments.

Mr. Fallon: The information is not available in the form requested. Licensed teachers are employed by local education authorities and school governing bodies and are paid in accordance with the teachers' pay and conditions document 1990.

Training and associated costs for licensed teachers, including payment of incentive allowances to mentor teachers and the provision of supply cover both for the licensee and mentor, are eligible for support under the grants for education support and training programme.

A table showing the amount of local education authority expenditure to be supported in the 1990-91 and 1991-92 financial years and the number of licensed teachers expected to be supported has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what monitoring he is undertaking of the costs and effectiveness of the licensed teacher scheme; how many local authorities are operating the scheme; and how many teachers are involved.

Mr. Fallon: We have commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to evaluate the scope, organisation and effectiveness of the first two years of the licensed teacher route to qualified teacher status. In addition to its routine inspections, Her Majesty's inspectorate is conducting a three-term examination of the licensed teacher programmes being operated by 11 local education authorities. In 1990-91, 57 LEAs applied under the local education authority training grants scheme and were allocated £2·3 million to support the training of 500 licensed teachers. For 1991-92, 67 LEAs have been allocated £5·4 million to support 1,500 licensed teachers under the grant for education support and training programme. A condition of receiving funding under this programme is that authorities monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their training schemes for licensed teachers.

Oxbridge Undergraduates

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of undergraduates who enter Oxford and Cambridge university colleges who came from local authority-maintained schools; and if he will show the numbers as a proportion of the entry as a whole for each college for each of the last five years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information on individual institutions is collected by the "Universities Statistical Record". Apart from regularly published information, further data at the institutional level may be released only with the prior authorisation of the institution.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Eggar: The equipment stolen from the Department over the last three years is as follows:

		£
1	Portable typewriter	208·00
7	Dictating Machines at £68 each	476·00
1	Calculator	51·00
1	Pocket Calculator	9·00
1	Pocket memo dictating machine	74·00
1	Camera (taken from the site of Nottingham CTC)	290·00
1	Video recorder	245·00
1	Long play video recorder	334·00

Assisted Place Pupils

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of assisted place pupils who have entered higher and continuing education and the number who have entered Oxford and Cambridge colleges; and if he will show such figures for each full year as available.

Mr. Fallon: The numbers of APS pupils entering universities, polytechnics and other establishments of further and higher education is available for academic years 1988-89 onward and are shown in the table. Information is not collected on the particular institutions which pupils enter.

Destination of Assisted Pupil leavers

Academic Year	*Numbers of assisted pupils*[1]				
	University	*Polytechnic*	*FHE*	*Total*	*Total pupils leaving AP schools*
1988-89	1,560	400	354	2,314	2,783
1989-90[2]	1,822	432	611	2,865	3,670

[1] Figures include both fifth and sixth form leavers.
[2] Subject to confirmation.

Nuclear Structure Facility, Daresbury

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will allocate to the Science and Engineering Research Council £20 million earmarked for funding for the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury;

(2) if he will give the allocated budgets for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 for the synchrotron radiation source project and the nuclear structure facility at the Daresbury laboratory of the Science and Engineering Research Council in Cheshire.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend allocates the science budget to the Science and Engineering Research Council and other bodies in the light of advice from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. It is for the research councils to determine the detailed allocation of the funds made available to them.

Shire Counties (Expenditure)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all shire counties in England in rank order of expenditure *(a)* per secondary pupil and *(b)* per primary pupil (i) including all items included in the general schools budget except capital and (ii) as in (i) but also excluding school meals and home-to-school transport for the latest year for which he has information.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is not yet available.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church of England (Vacancies)

37. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what is the average period of vacancy for (i) bishoprics and (ii) incumbencies in the Church of England.

Mr. Alison: Over the last five years the average period of vacancy for diocesan bishops has been 22 weeks and for incumbents 29 weeks.

DEFENCE

Atomic Weapons Establishment Bill

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has now made of the costs anticipated for 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 to fund the proposals by the Atomic Weapons Establishment Bill, since his statement to the House of 18 December 1990, *Official Report*, column 251.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The only expenditure I expect to arise directly from the provisions of the Atomic Weapons Establishment Bill, as opposed to expenditure which the Secretary of State is able to make under his existing powers, is that of setting up an employing company at AWE. As I told the House on 18 December, this is likely to be of the order of £50,000. This will probably be incurred during 1991-92.

The Gulf

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expressions of concern he has received from service men and their families about the length of time that mail takes to arrive in the Gulf and about the non-arrival of some mail; and what respons he proposes to make.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have received a number of letters from service families expressing concern about the length of time it takes for mail to arrive in the Gulf, but these must be set against the very large volume of mail being delivered daily to our forces.

All forces mail to the Gulf is being moved by RAF aircraft. The transit time for letters is around five days and ten days for parcels, though these timings may be exceeded for troops in forward positions.

The importance of an efficient mail service is fully appreciated by the Services and every effort is made to achieve the earliest possible delivery.

Foreign Service Personnel (Training)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what income was derived from foreign and Commonwealth personnel sent for training at United Kingdom service establishments in each of the years 1985 to 1990 inclusive; and what amounts were paid in each year by the Government of Iraq.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The income from training foreign and commonwealth personnel at United Kingdom service establishments in the financial years 1985-86 to 1989-90 is set out below. It is not our practice to release details of military training provided for individual countries—details of payments by Iraq are not held centrally and would require disproportionate effort to collect.

Financial Year	*£ million*
1985-86	25·0
1986-87	47·9
1987-88	41·2
1988-89	50·2
1989-90	51·7

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The number and value of major cases of theft of assets reported in the three most recent years for which information is available were provided in the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on Fraud and Irregularities at Defence Establishments HC 134 (14 January 1991) at Table 1.

Three of the cases are covered in greater detail in cases 4, 5 and 6 of appendix 1 to that report, and the other two cases were:

1987-88

£22,761—Controlled and prescription only drugs.

1989-90

£19,707—Equipment.

Details of the individual items of equipment included in these major cases and in minor theft cases, which are handled at unit/establishment level, cannot be provided without disproportionate effort.

Land Acquisition

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all land acquisitions by his Department in Scotland in the last 10 years, giving the dates of the acquisitions, the area acquired, and whether each acquisition is in the form of *(a)* freehold, *(b)* leasehold and *(c)* training rights.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Anti-tank Device

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the third tranche of orders for the anti-tank device will be placed with Royal Ordnance plc.

Mr. Alan Clark: Manufacturing release for the third tranche of the light anti-armour weapon 80 (LAW 80) is under consideration. I hope to make a decision shortly.

The Gulf

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what units are currently on standby for the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has announced the deployment to the Gulf of a further half squadron of RAF Buccaneer aircraft. Any additional deployments will be announced as appropriate when they arise.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether any plans for rotating units in the Gulf could result in United Kingdom forces being replaced by forces from other Community countries;

(2) what plans he has for rotating units currently serving in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The roulement of units in the Gulf will, if necessary, be considered as part of the normal military planning process, but is unlikely to involve the replacement of British units by forces from other European Community countries.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors, if any, compromise the minimisation of allied casualties as the overriding priority in considering how and at what time the plans for the liberation of Kuwait should be put into effect.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The aim of the current allied air campaign is to reduce the ability and the will of the Iraqi forces to fight, so that allied ground forces can, if necessary, complete the liberation of Kuwait in the shortest possible time with the fewest casualties.

Defence Jobs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the consequence in Wales for jobs in defence establishments following the decision to reduce in real terms defence spending.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State indicated to the House on 21 January at column 103, we are continuing to study the broad proposals stemming from the options for change study. We will keep the House informed of progress in our planning as the implications for individual establishments become clearer.

HMS Onyx and Brereton

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he proposes to pay off *(a)* HMS Onyx and *(b)* HMS Brereton; when he announced each such decision; what further vessels he intends to announce the decommissioning of in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Onyx was decommissioned in December 1990. HMS Brereton is to be decommissioned in April 1991. It is not our normal practice to announce formally the decommissioning of individual vessels. Other ships which are to be decommissioned in the current financial year are HMS Penelope, HMS Hubberston, HMS Cuxton, HMS Cormorant and HMS Hart.

Holy Loch

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *167*, under what circumstances he envisages visits to the Holy loch by United States naval vessels carrying cruise missiles after the base has been closed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no specific plans for future visits to the Holy loch by United States vessels after the submarine forward support facility has closed. However, the Holy loch is currently one of a number of berths around the United Kingdom approved for visits by nuclear powered submarines. Holy loch's use for future periodic visits is therefore possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *280*, what plans he has to extend the non-fossil fuel obligation provisions of the Electricity Act 1989 to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans to extend the non-fossil fuel obligation provisions of the Electricity Act to Northern Ireland. However, in drawing up proposals

for electricity privatisation in Northern Ireland, I am considering legislative provisions to encourage the use of renewable energy sources. I expect to publish the proposals shortly.

General Grant Factor

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the general grant factor in pence per pound for each district council for 1980-81 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Needham: The information is not recorded in the form requested.

Leisure Facilities

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the income from recreation and leisure facilities for each district council for the last available year and state the number of such facilities in respect of each council.

Mr. Needham: The income from recreation and leisure facilities for the 1989-90 year is set out below. Information about the number of facilities in respect of each council is not held centrally.

	£
Antrim	233,251
Ards	374,905
Armagh	189,989
Ballymena	215,486
Ballymoney	213,475
Banbridge	180,021
Belfast	2,951,829
Carrickfergus	461,142
Castlereagh	1,901,042
Coleraine	963,758
Cookstown	101,546
Craigavon	782,775
Derry	746,218
Down	347,639
Dungannon	144,177
Fermanagh	649,150
Larne	127,517
Limavady	220,400
Lisburn	409,556
Magherafelt	197,189
Moyle	209,563
Newry and Mourne	403,414
Newtownabbey	537,666
North Down	378,294
Omagh	352,411
Strabane	153,711

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many district councils sought, and how many received, Government loan sanction to build leisure facilities where a Department of Education grant was unavailable; and if he will list the councils and the schemes.

Mr. Needham: The information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Regional Rates

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the regional rate in Northern Ireland for each year since 1980-81.

Dr. Mawhinney: The regional rate in Northern Ireland for each year since 1980-81 is set out in the table:

Year	*Regional rate (non-domestic) (pence)*
1980-81	71·7
1981-82	78·7
1982-83	84·1
1983-84	86·54
1984-85	93·34
1985-86	100·87
1986-87	110·38
1987-88	113·53
1988-89	122·59
1989-90	138·07
1990-91	148·27

Domestic ratepayers have received a reduction of 12 pence in the poundage each year, through the domestic rate aid grant. The resulting domestic regional rate poundages were:

Year	*Regional rate (domestic) (pence)*
1980-81	59·70
1981-82	66·70
1982-83	72·10
1983-84	74·54
1984-85	81·34
1985-86	88·87
1986-87	98·38
1987-88	101·53
1988-89	110·59
1989-90	126·07
1990-91	136·27

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the percentage increase in Northern Ireland's regional rate for each year since 1980-81; and what was the annual rate of inflation for each year.

Dr. Mawhinney: The percentage increase in Northern Ireland's regional rate and the annual rate of inflation in April for each year since 1980-81 is set out below.

Year	*Per cent. increase (non-domestic)*	*Per cent. increase (domestic)*	*Per cent. annual rate of inflation*
1980-81	17·9	22·3	21·8
1981-82	9·8	11·7	12·0
1982-83	6·9	8·1	9·4
1983-84	2·9	3·4	4·0
1984-85	7·9	9·1	5·2
1985-86	8·1	9·3	6·8
1986-87	9·4	10·7	3·0
1987-88	2·9	3·2	4·4
1988-89	7·98	8·92	3·9

Year	Per cent. increase (non-domestic)	Per cent. increase (domestic)	Per cent. Annual rate of inflation
1989-90	12·63	14·0	8·0
1990-91	7·39	8·09	9·4

District Councils

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the penny product for each Northern Ireland district council's district rate.

Mr. Needham: The information is set out in the table:

Penny rate products for each Northern Ireland district council 1990-91 year

District	1p Product £
Antrim	51,960
Ards	59,350
Armagh	38,640
Ballymena	59,470
Ballymoney	19,020
Banbridge	27,870
Belfast	400,790
Carrickfergus	30,690
Castlereagh	63,230
Coleraine	59,030
Cookstown	23,020
Craigavon	71,280
Derry	84,080
Down	46,730
Dungannon	32,880
Fermanagh	40,550
Larne	28,820
Limavady	22,230
Lisburn	95,700
Magherafelt	25,240
Moyle	11,810
Newry and Mourne	61,680
Newtownabbey	81,520
North Down	77,340
Omagh	34,860
Strabane	23,130

Housing, Belfast

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what number and percentage of houses in each housing district in Belfast were declared unfit for human habitation in each of the years between 1979 and 1991.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I have been advised by the chief executive that the information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many houses have been built by *(a)* the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and *(b)* housing associations in each housing district in Belfast over the period from 1979 to 1991.

Mr. Needham: *(a)* This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I have been advised by the chief executive that the information sought for the period 1979-80—1981-82 is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. For the period 1982-83—1990-91 the numbers of dwellings built are as follows:

Belfast Housing Districts

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1982-83	118	486	217	215	109	209	390
1983-84	40	367	107	179	126	361	308
1984-85	41	331	198	244	38	173	325
1985-86	63	393	408	110	124	179	183
1986-87	47	146	135	164	148	183	191
1987-88	—	237	122	83	193	115	175
1988-89	22	184	108	136	167	78	129
1989-90	35	308	80	70	184	77	52
[1]1990-91	38	124	74	99	125	17	85

[1] Figures for 1990-91 are for the period April 1990-January 1991.

(b) The numbers of dwellings built by registered housing associations for the period 1979-80 to 1990-91 are as follows:

Belfast housing districts

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1979-80	—	—	—	37	—	—	—
1980-81	—	19	—	55	—	—	—
1981-82	—	8	—	—	5	—	—
1982-83	—	89	—	25	9	28	66
1983-84	22	70	—	7	2	64	96
1984-85	—	72	—	11	68	40	250
1985-86	—	77	—	22	56	22	58
1986-87	31	51	—	—	41	8	46
1987-88	—	45	—	36	38	11	91
1988-89	—	76	—	—	48	17	133
1989-90	40	4	—	—	10	45	27
[1]1990-91	4	30	7	—	—	46	81

[1] Figures for 1990-91 are for the period April 1990-January 1991.

General Grant Factor

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the general grant factor paid to each district council in Northern Ireland in 1990-91 and the amount that would have been paid if the 1980-81 general grant factor had been used.

Mr. Needham: The total estimated amount of general grant due to each district council in 1990-91 is set out in the table:

Estimated grant payable in 1990-91 year

Council	£
Antrim	271,500
Ards	1,246,451
Armagh	981,329
Ballymena	485,881
Ballymoney	560,834
Banbridge	594,700
Belfast	5,490,717
Carrickfergus	472,571
Castlereagh	373,483
Coleraine	296,053
Cookstown	589,420
Craigavon	1,607,153
Derry	3,700,423
Down	1,514,200
Dungannon	987,085
Fermanagh	1,105,293
Larne	440,627
Limavady	660,561
Lisburn	1,063,829
Magherafelt	710,623
Moyle	480,442
Newry and Mourne	2,594,300
Newtownabbey	914,170
North Down	678,434
Omagh	1,182,481
Strabane	1,259,828

It is not possible to apply the 1980-81 general grant factor to district council expenditure in 1990-91. The calculation of the general grant factor is dependent on the population, rateable valuations and the penny rate product for a district in a particular year. The criteria applying in 1980-81 are not comparable with those applying in 1990-91.

Spelling

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will postpone the implementation of proposals to penalise pupils who have difficulty with spelling in examinations; and what provision is being made to prevent disadvantaging dyslexic children when penalties for poor spelling are introduced at examination level.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Northern Ireland Schools Examinations and Assessment Council (NISEAC) is required by law to seek to ensure that its examinations are recognised as equivalent in standard to those conducted elsewhere in the United Kingdom. As part of the process of achieving this its GCSE syllabuses conform to the nationally set general and subject criteria for GCSE and, if there is any change to those criteria, this would affect NISEAC examinations also. The possible introduction of a penalty for poor spelling is currently being considered by the joint council for the GCSE and final decisions have not yet been taken.

On the matter of the position of dyslexic children, for reasons of equivalence of standards it will be necessary to conform to whatever arrangements are agreed in relation to the spelling penalty for these pupils, and others with learning difficulties, in England and Wales.

Hazardous Waste, Maydown

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the consideration given by the Industrial Development Board to funding a hazardous waste incinerator at Dupont's Maydown complex; what discussions have taken place with Dupont on the subject of grant aid; what figures are being indicated; and what discussions have taken place between the Department of Economic Development and the Industrial Development Board on such grant aid.

Mr. Needham: The Industrial Development Board has not yet given detailed consideration to financial support for a high temperature waste incinerator at Maydown. Du Pont is still at a very early stage in considering the feasibility of constructing such a facility.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any Northern Ireland Government Minister, Department or public agency communicated with any public official of the Irish Republic regarding Dupont's interest in hazardous waste incineration at its Maydown plant prior to receipt of a letter from the appropriate Minister in the Republic of Ireland in November 1990.

Mr. Needham: No.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to establish the nations from which supplies relating to the extension of Scud missiles, the manufacture of chemical and biological weapons and the preparation of nuclear weapons, in Iraq were provided; if he will make a statement setting out the information he currently has on the subject; and if he will further indicate which supplies were in breach of international or EC trade restrictions.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are a variety of agreements to which most EC countries subscribe. We are not in a position to say where such supplies were obtained.

Accountancy Monitoring

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy before awarding the supervisory status created for accountancy and auditing under the Companies Act 1989 to any accountancy body, to inquire whether the reports of the monitoring unit are accessible to members of the public.

Mr. Redwood: I understand that the reports will not be available to the public.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy prior to

making any decision on conferring supervisory status to any accountancy body to inquire whether all firms permitted to carry out audits are bonded.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State will recognise an applicant for recognition only if, among other things, it has adequate rules or arrangements designed to ensure that its company auditing members take such steps as may reasonably be expected of them to secure that they are able to meet claims against them arising out of company audit work.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether any of the applicants for the supervisory status created for accountancy and auditing by the Companies Act 1989 have informed him of their intentions to consult the public for their arrangements on auditor monitoring;

(2) whether he will make it his policy to request applicants for the supervisory status in the accountancy and auditing regime created by the Companies Act 1989 to consult the public on the rules for auditor independence.

Mr. Redwood: The applicants have assured me that they are ready to make details of the applications available on request. I welcome this and will take into account any representations I receive from the public in considering the applications.

Software Directive

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the Common position on the software directive adopted by the Council of Ministers allows vendors to engage in limited reverse analysis of a program for the purpose of developing a new program which competes with the program being analysed;

(2) if he will make it his policy to seek modifications to the EC draft software directive to add a limited derogation for maintenance purposes;

(3) in what circumstances the compilation of software into a form which is readable by human beings will be permitted under the European software directive.

Mr. Leigh: The Council of Ministers adopted a common position on the EC directive on the legal protection of computer programs in December and modification of its terms can be made only if the European Parliament proposes amendments. The directive does not provide a general exception to copyright to allow the reproduction or translation of a program in any form or to allow its analysis for the purpose of maintenance or for producing a new product. There will, however, be cases where such activities will fall within the scope of exceptions in articles 5 or 6. These provisions allow error correction, analysis of a program during running and decompilation of a program for the purpose of achieving interoperability of an independently created program with another program, subject to certain conditions.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what consideration he has given to the impact that a vendor monopoly on the service of computer programs would have on independent systems integrators and maintenance firms;

(2) what consideration he has given to the costs that a monopoly to conduct program maintenance would impose on computer users in terms of high prices, service and product choice.

Mr. Leigh: The aim of the EC software directive is to afford protection to computer programs as their development requires the investment of substantial resources. Some exceptions to protection are, however, permitted and these will allow certain maintenance activities. In any event, those supplying maintenance services to the users of computer systems are subject to both national and Community competition law relating to abuse of monopolies and restrictive practices.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that the views of users of information technology concerning the EC software directive are represented to the European Commission.

Mr. Leigh: My Department sought the views of all interested parties, including users, throughout the negotiations on the EC software directive and all these views were taken into account in determining the United Kingdom attitude to the proposals. User groups also made their views known to the EC Commission.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether acts characterised as United Kingdom local custom and usage in the computer industry and undertaken to maintain computer programs will be permitted by the EC directive on software copyright;

(2) whether acts characterised as United Kingdom local custom and usage in the computer industry and undertaken to engage in reverse analysis of computer programs to develop non-infringing programs will be permitted under the EC directive on software copyright.

Mr. Leigh: The directive will require member states to give copyright protection to computer programs as literary works. This is already the case in the United Kingdom. When the directive is implemented, the protection afforded will be very similar to that already existing here, so the legality, or otherwise, of the activities referred to as "local custom and usage" will not change to any significant degree.

Securities and Investments Board

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the status and accountability of the Securities and Investments Board.

Mr. Redwood: The Securities and Investments Board is the designated agency to which certain functions have been transferred under section 114 of the Financial Services Act 1986. Section 117 of the Act requires the SIB to report at least once in each year to the Secretary of State on the discharge of those functions and requires the Secretary of State to lay copies of the reports before Parliament.

Money Laundering

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of money laundering were brought to his attention in each year since 1985 by either (1) the public, (2) his inspectors, (3) the Official Receiver, (4) the Serious Fraud Office, (5) agencies created under the Financial Services Act and (6) other professional or regulatory agencies.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not available in the form requested.

Company Asset Figures

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement of the uses his Department makes of the company asset figures included in his Department's annual report on companies under table E1.

Mr. Redwood: The figures show how information on company accounts held at Companies House can be used in producing aggregate financial data. Thes figures are aimed primarily at providing general information for outside readership, rather than for the Department's own use. More detailed figures which are extracted from these sources are published which can be used in the analysis of industrial and commercial sectors by both Government and outside bodies.

Binder Hamlyn

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any of his inspectors appointed since 1979 have been partners in Binder Hamlyn.

Mr. Redwood: Yes. Three partners in BDO Binder Hamlyn have been appointed inspectors since 1979.

Auditors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is considering proposing legislation to require the auditors' terms in office for banks and insurance companies to be rotated every five years; and what representations he has so far received on this matter from accountants or bodies linked to the accountancy profession.

Mr. Redwood: We have no plans for such legislation. Responses to two recent consultation exercises were overwhelmingly against requiring companies to change auditors at regular intervals on the grounds that it would increase costs and make audits less effective as each new set of auditors would have to start from scratch in building up knowledge about the client which is essential if the audit is to be effective.

Levitt Group

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many communications he has received from the receivers on the affairs of the Levitt Group; and how many meetings have been held between his Department and the receivers on the affairs of the Levitt Group.

Mr. Redwood: My Department is in contact with the liquidators as and when the need arises.

Telecommunications

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he has made in his discussions with the Director General of Telecommunications to ensure that premium rate services are provided only following an opt-in decision by the subscriber, communicated in writing.

Mr. Redwood: The regulation of premium rate telephone services is primarily, a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications, Sir Bryan Carsberg. He has welcomed British Telecom's recent introduction of optional call-barring to premium rate services, as recommended by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its report on chatlines and message services published in January 1989.

British Telecom are able to make the facility available to customers on digital exchanges. It will become more widely available as more exchanges are digitalised.

Companies House

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will give a breakdown of the manner in which the 1989-90 surplus of the Companies House executive agency has been disbursed.

Mr. Redwood: Companies House's operating surplus funds the wider costs of running the system of regulating companies and developing company law. In 1989-90 the relevant costs were investigations division (including external inspections) £10·5 million, companies division £1·6 million and the solicitors' office £0·5 million.

Overseas British Companies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he intends to propose legislation to require British companies operating overseas to reveal information about the constraints on the remittance of overseas cash and other assets.

Mr. Redwood: Issues of this sort are better dealt with through accounting standards than in the law. I understand that this is one of the points which the Accounting Standards Board will be considering as it develops its work on accounting standards, taking into account the difficulties as well as the benefits which might flow from such a requirement.

Export Credits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list by country the total sums involved in claims covered by signed bilateral rescheduling agreements with Export Credits Guarantee Department as at 31 March 1989 and 31 March 1990.

Mr. Leigh: It is not the practice of this or previous Governments to disclose the amounts of debt rescheduled bilaterally by the Export Credits Guarantee Department on a country-by-country basis.

Figures for ECGD's debt restructuring on a regional basis are as follows:

Amounts outstanding under signed bilateral agreements

£ million

Region	*31 March 1989*	*1990*
CENTRAL AMERICA		
Countries involved:		
Costa Rica, Cuba, Jamaica, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago	113·44	121·74
SOUTH AMERICA		
Countries involved:		
Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru	483·29	801·82

Region	31 March 1989	31 March 1990
EUROPE		
Countries involved:		
Poland, Romania, Turkey, Yugoslavia	1,402·05	1,383·44
AFRICA		
Countries involved:		
Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Republic, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia	2,121·97	2,928·46
ASIA		
Countries involved:		
Indonesia, Philippines	51·77	67·78

Export Guarantees Advisory Council

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all the members of the Export Guarantees Advisory Council from 1983 with the dates on which their appointments were made and terminated.

Mr. Leigh: The information requested is as follows:

Name	Appointed	Terminated
A. W. Higgins, Esq, MBE, MC, DL, JP	1977	1983
R. J. Withers, Esq, CBE	1978	1983
P. E. Leslie, Esq	1978	1981
D. F. Rees, Esq, OBE	1979	1984
J. N. Scott, Esq	1980	1986
R. J. Dent, Esq	1980	1985
J. F. Main, Esq, OBE	1980	1983
Sir Jeffrey Benson	1981	1987
Miss M. Neville-Rolfe	1982	1985
W. J. A. Dacombe, Esq	1982	1986
M. D. McWilliams, Esq	1982	1987
W. Hogbin, Esq	1983	1988
W. G. Barrett, Esq	1983	1986
R. H. George, Esq, OBE	1984	—
E. L. Brooks, Esq	1984	—
M. M. Baker, Esq	1985	1986
P. W. Bulfield, Esq	1985	1988
T. W. B. Sallitt, Esq, CBE	1986	1990
P. E. Leslie, Esq	1986	—
A. G. Gormly, Esq	1988	—
Hon. D. Douglas-Home, CBE	1988	—
S. M. F. Harris, Esq	1988	—
Prof. K. Schöles	1988	—
D. G. Eustace, Esq	1988	—
F. M. P. Riding, Esq	1988	—

Iraq (Exports)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total sum provided or arranged under the export credit schemes to assist United Kingdom exports to Iraq in each of the last five years.

Mr. Leigh: I refer to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade gave to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 17 October 1990, *Official Report*, column *837*.

Wool

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report of a joint DTI/HM Customs investigation into wool fibre deficiencies in wool imported from the Prato region of Italy is to be published; for how long the investigation was conducted; how many samples were tested; what action he proposes taking following the investigation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* The results of the investigation into certain wool imports have so far been inconclusive. We are now exploring the possibility of a further exercise on a wider basis.

Carpets

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he has taken to improve surveillance of labelling by overseas carpet manufacturers, following a recent survey by the West Yorkshire Trading Standards Authority which was reported to him; how many sample tests of carpets have been carried out by his Department in each of the past five years to check whether fibre content conforms to label descriptions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* My Department has not conducted any testing exercise in respect of the fibre content of carpets.

Company Liquidations

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list by local authority area the number of company liquidations for the first six months of the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91 and the percentage change between these two figures.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* This information could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the occupancy levels of employment training in terms of *(a)* actual numbers and *(b)* target numbers by (i) training and enterprise council area and (ii) standard occupational classification.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated that there are currently about 197,000 people on employment training; this figure cannot be broken down as requested. Targets for those in training and by standard occupational classification are not available.

Noise at Work

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prohibition notices were issued against employers in 1989-90 relating to the control of noise at work for each of the geographical areas of, respectively, the factory inspectorate, the mines and quarries inspectorate, the agricultural inspectorate and the railways inspectorate.

Mr. Forth: The following prohibition notices were issued by the factory inspectorate[1] during the period 1989-90.

	Number
London South West	1
South Yorkshire and Humberside	1
East Midlands	1

[1] No prohibition notices were issued for noise related offences by HSE's agricultural inspectorate, and mines and quarries inspectorates or by the railways inspectorates during the period 1989-90.

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many improvement notices were issued against employers in 1989-90 relating to control of noise at work for each of the geographical areas of, respectively, the factory inspectorate, the mines and quarries inspectorate, the agricultural inspectorate and the railways inspectorate.

Mr. Forth: The following improvement notices were issued during the period 1989-90.

	Factory inspectorate[1]	*Agricultural inspectorate*	*Quarries inspectorate*
South West	9	—	1
South	1	—	—
South East	—	—	—
Greater London	11	—	—
East Anglia	9	—	—
North Home Counties	6	—	—
East Midlands	3	—	—
West Midlands	2	—	—
Wales	1	—	1
Marches	10	—	—
North Midlands	13	—	—
South Yorkshire and Humberside	15	4	—
West and North Yorkshire	3	—	—
Greater Manchester	7	—	—
Merseyside	3	—	—
North West	2	1	—
North East	9	—	—
Scotland East	5	—	—
Scotland West	3	—	—
TOTAL	112	5	2

[1] No improvement notices were issued for noise related offences by Health and Safety Executive's mines inspectorate and railway inspectorate during the period 1989-90.

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions were taken against employers in 1989-90 relating to the control of noise at work for each of the geographical areas of, respectively, the factory inspectorate, the mines and quarries inspectorate, the agricultural inspectorate and railways inspectorate; and what were the penalties in each case.

Mr. Forth: One information was laid in the period 1989-90 in respect of noise-related offences: This was taken by the factory inspectorate[1] in the west and north Yorkshire area. It resulted in a conviction with a fine of £1,800.

[1] No proceedings were instituted for noise related offences by the Health and Safety Executive's agricultural inspectorate, and mines and quarries inspectorate, or by the railway inspectorate during the period 1989-90.

Labour Statistics, Kent

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the level of unemployment for each parliamentary constituency in Kent in *(a)* June 1990 and *(b)* November 1990;

(2) for each parliamentary constituency in Kent, what was the level of unemployment in *(a)* June 1990 and *(b)* November 1990, calculated on the same basis as that which was used to make such calculations by his Department in April 1979;

(3) what was the level of unemployment in April 1979, for each parliamentary constituency in Kent.

Mr. Jackson: Unemployment data for parliamentary constituencies is only available from July 1983. The available information is obtainable from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. It is not possible to estimate the number of people who would now be registered as unemployed according to the basis prevailing in 1979. At that time people had to register at jobcentres or careers offices as well as unemployment benefit offices in order to qualify for benefits. These procedures no longer exist.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many companies and how many individuals were prosecuted under the Contol of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, between 1 October 1989 and 31 December 1990; how many and what percentage of those prosecutions were successful; and what penalties were imposed on those found guilty of such offences.

Mr. Forth: Provisional figures for the first year of operation of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations—1 October 1989 to 30 September 1990—show a total of 29 informations laid under the regulations by HSE's factory and agricultural inspectorates. These resulted in 28 convictions—97 per cent.—with an average fine of £604 imposed. All these proceedings were taken against employers. No prosecutions were taken under the COSHH regulations against individuals as employees or self-employed persons.

Self-employed People

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the percentage of self-employed people in the work forces of member states of the EC.

Mr. Jackson: The information is shown in the table.

Self employed as a percentage of the civilian workforce

	1988 (mid year) percentage
Belgium	12·8
Denmark	8·3
Federal Republic of Germany	[1]8·8
France	13·8
Greece	32·5
Ireland	18·8
Italy	21·6
Luxembourg	10·2
Netherlands	8·8
Portugal	29·2
Spain	18·0
United Kingdom	[2]10·7

Source: OECD Labour Statistics 1968-1988 except United Kingdom (ED).

[1] Figures are for 1986, latest available.

[2] The latest available figure (September 1990) is 11·9 per cent.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the number of unemployed people in the Paisley, South constituency for each September between 1979 until 1990.

Mr. Jackson: Unemployment figures for parliamentary constituencies have only been available since June 1983. The following information is available in the Library. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants in the Paisley, South parliamentary constituency in each September for the years 1983 to 1990.

The number of unemployed claimants in the Paisley South parliamentary constituency in September of each year (not seasonally adjusted)

Year	*Number*
1983	6,021
1984	5,854
1985	5,710
1986	5,596
1987	5,228
1988	4,317
1989	3,147
1990	2,785

Direct comparisons are affected by the changes in the coverage of the count that have occurred over the period.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table in ranked order showing the total rises in unemployment over the past 12 months in the 50 worst affected parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Jackson: The information is available on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Training, Merseyside

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will make a statement on the future of training schemes provided by the Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service;

(2) by how many places the allocation of adult training places on the Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service scheme have been reduced; and what provision he will now make for the training of the category of trainees previously assisted by the Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service;

(3) by how much the total number of training places, available through employment training, has been cut in the Merseyside area;

(4) if he will visit the Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service scheme.

Mr. Jackson: I am writing to the hon. Gentleman.

Ford Motor Company

Mr. Aspinwall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department has monitored the success of the employee development and assistance programme operated by Ford Motor Company in Britain; and whether he has plans to encourage other major companies to launch similar schemes.

Mr. Jackson: My Department is following closely the progress of the Ford employee development and assistance programme which supports a wide range of opportunities for the personal development of the company's employees. I welcome any company initiatives that will assist in developing the skills and competencies of individual employees.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Jackson: Equipment stolen and written off in the Department's annual accounts over the past three years for which information is available is as follows:

1988-89		*1989-90*		*1990-91 (to date)*	
Item	*£*	*Item*	*£*	*Item*	*£*
12 cameras and photographic equipment	17,195	Six cameras	2,278	10 cameras	1,100
Five typewriters	2,070	Two typewriters	850	Six dictation machines	220
One video camera	1,144	Six dictation machines	456	One telephone and answer machine	200
Three video recorders	2,300	Four telephones/ancillaries	240	One video camera and two video recorders	2,200
Three dictation machines	188	One TV and video	680	One visual display unit, printer	2,100

1988-89 Item	£	1989-90 Item	£	1990-91 (to date) Item	£
One telephone	24	One visual display unit and printer	2,814	Four scientific instruments	132
Two office machines	275	—	—	Video equipment	1,923
Other stores	475	—	—	One gas cylinder	110
—	—	—	—	One microwave oven	220
Total value (to nearest £)	23,671		7,318		8,205

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will provide, for each quarter since September 1989, the number of decisions concerning (i) refusal of employment, (ii) actively seeking work, (iii) restricted availability and (iv) neglect to avail oneself of employment, in which the time between receiving the referral and the adjudication officer's decision was *(a)* up to seven days, *(b)* eight to 14 days, *(c)* 15 to 21 days, *(d)* 22 to 28 days and *(e)* over 28 days, as recorded by the 5 per cent. sample of adjudication officer decisions;

(2) under what circumstances the disqualification, disallowance or suspension of a claim for unemployment benefit and/or income support results in a person's removal from the unemployment register;

(3) if he will make a statement on the progress that has been made on introducing the new framework and active signing in each region of the Employment Service and the impact of the changes on the implementation of the Social Security Act 1989.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred these questions for reply.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all reports completed and the expected dates of publication of future Government reports on the operation of the "actively seeking employment" procedures.

Mr. Jackson: No reports on the operation of the "actively seeking employment" procedures have been completed. It is not possible to provide dates of publication for future Government reports concerning these procedures, as these will depend on the nature of the work commissioned and the time taken to complete any research.

HEALTH

Medicine Inspectors

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost per hour of employing a medicines inspector; and what is the charge per hour to those requiring an inspection for a wholesale dealers licence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Current pay scales for medicines inspectors are £16,822 to £22,138 and £21,905 to £27,299 for a principal medicines inspector. In addition there are overheads including superannuation, national insurance, accommodation, training, travel and subsistence and support services. These costs cannot be allocated to the different grade of inspector or, until the current unit cost evaluation and fee review is completed, to the type of inspection undertaken. Fees for inspections are at a standard rate and not charged at an hourly rate.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inspections have been undertaken by the Medicines Control Agency in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is shown in the table:

	Number
1987-1988[1]	867
1988-1989	900
1989-1990	891

[1](April 1—March 31)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the present cost of a wholesale dealers licence from the Medicines Control Agency; and whether any additional charges are involved in applying for and obtaining such a licence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An application for a wholesale dealers licence costs £1,105. An inspection is usually necessary in order to determine the application for pharmacy and prescription-only medicines wholesalers, for which there is an additional fee of £1,105.

Breast Care Nurses

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Royal College of Nursing concerning the setting of standards for breast care nurses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Standards of nursing care are a matter for the profession. Representatives from the NHS breast screening programme, in partnership with the Royal College of Nursing, are in the advanced stages of determining standards for nurses working in the programme's assessment centres. General standards for breast care nurses are being drawn up with the breast care nurses forum at the Royal College of Nursing.

Haemophiliacs

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemophiliacs who require Factor VIII injections are given the new highly purified material from

Armour Pharmaceuticals; how many are given the older material from Bio Products; and if he will provide a breakdown for each regional health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Pain Relief

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information he has regarding the number of national health service hospitals that have a pain management team for cancer patients; and if every nationl health service hospital treating cancer patients has a pain relief consultant;

(2) what information he has regarding the number of national health service hospitals with a specific person responsible for pain relief post-operatively;

(3) if he will estimate the national health service personnel, time and funds available to relieve post-operative pain;

(4) how many national health service hospitals have a policy for managing post-operative pain;

(5) what information he has regarding the number of national health service in-patient beds allocated for pain relief investigation and management; and by what percentage the figure has changed in the last five years;

(6) if he will list the pain relief facilities possessed by each national health service region, including comprehensive pain clinics and hospices;

(7) what studies have been carried out by his Department of American pain management programmes; how many such programmes there are in national health service hospitals; and what information he has regarding the cost effectiveness of such programmes;

(8) what information he has regarding the number of hours per week devoted to the relief of chronic pain in national health service hospitals;

(9) what information he has on the number of national health service in-patient beds allocated for pain relief investigation and management;

(10) if he will request national health service regions, when allocating funds to district health authorities, to require them to identify resources being used for pain relief;

(11) what guidance he has given to the national health service regions regarding provision for pain relief; if he monitors such provision; and what additional funding he has provided for it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information about numbers of beds, financial and staffing resources allocated to the investigation and management of pain including post-operative pain is not held centrally. All medical and nursing staff will wish to relieve pain experienced by their patients. It is for health authorities acting upon the advice of clinicians to determine the level of pain relief services they consider necessary to meet the needs of their populations and make suitable arrangements for such provision. In doing so, they will wish to take into account the report of the joint working party on pain after surgery published by the Royal College of Surgeons and College of Anaesthetists in September 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library. Study of American pain management programmes and evaluation and adoption of that or any other pain management programme is first for the medical profession.

Hospices

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has regarding access for cancer patients to hospices; and if he will list the towns that have hospices and the towns with populations over 100,000 that do not have one.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The available evidence suggests that the majority of people admitted to hospices have cancer. It is for health authorities to ensure that terminally ill people and their families have access to a comprehensive range of health services. Information on hospice provision is not available in the form requested, but I understand that the St. Christopher's hospice information service regularly publishes a directory of hospice services.

London Ambulance Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *425*, which person or body authorised the reduced standard of response time applicable to ambulances in Greater London; what consultations he had and with which bodies or persons concerning the adoption of this standard; and on what date it will be adopted.

Mr. Dorrell: As indicated in my reply to the hon. Member on 21 January, at column *75*, the management executive advised health authorities of the adjusted recommended response times. Consultations took place with representatives of regional general managers and regional ambulance officers. It is for individual ambulance authorities to decide whether to adopt the recommended standards.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the number of *(a)* emergency and *(b)* non-emergency ambulance vehicles allocated to each of the ambulance stations of the London ambulance service, or held in servicing or reserve, as at 31 December 1990; and where such statistics are publicly available;

(2) what is the number of *(a)* trainee ambulance personnel and *(b)* qualified ambulance personnel in the employ of the London ambulance service at the latest convenient date; and how many with para-medical qualifications receive gross salaries of £13,000 per annum or more;

(3) if he will list the names of any ambulance stations of the emergency service of the London ambulance service which were unmanned for any period in the month of January, together with the total period and number of occasions of any such occurrence;

(4) what was the number of emergency ambulances of the London ambulance service manned and on duty for each of the shifts on each day of the week 7 to 13 January.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally. The management of the London ambulance service is the responsibility of the London ambulance service board. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. James Harris, the chairman of board, for details.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of *(a)* emergency and *(b)* non-emergency ambulance vehicles in the ownership of the London ambulance service; what was the number of vehicles constructed in each category in each year since 1981; and where such information is publicly available.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows the number of emergency and non-emergency vehicles in the ownership of the London ambulance service. Data are not collected centrally on the number of vehicles constructed/commissioned in each category. The management of the London ambulance service is the responsibility of the London ambulance service board. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. James Harris, the chairman, for details.

Ambulance service vehicles for London ambulance service

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
Ambulances				
2-trolley emergency	358	360	387	360
2-trolley dual purpose	—	—	—	—
Sitting case seats only (under 14)	396	338	286	265
Sitting case stretcher capacity	—	—	—	—
Sitting case seats plus lift mechanism	210	240	248	269
Car (with or without stretcher or wheelchair capacity)	—	—	—	—
Bus—14 or more seats with or without stretcher or wheelchair capacity	—	—	—	—
Total ambulance service vehicles used to transport patients	966	938	921	894
Other ambulance service vehicles				
Major incident vehicles, radio and/or equipment vehicles (trailers, caravans, etc.)	7	7	8	5
Recovery vehicles (Land Rover type or converted ambulance)	7	7	8	6
Other ambulance service vehicles	50	54	57	58
Total other ambulance service vehicles	64	68	73	69
Total ambulance service vehicles	1,030	1,006	994	963

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage of emergency calls received by the London ambulance service which showed response times within a period of 14 minutes for each day of December 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: Data are only available centrally on a financial year basis. In 1989-90 the London ambulance service responded to 78·8 per cent. of emergency calls within 14 minutes. The management of the London ambulance service is the responsibility of the London ambulance service board. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. James Harris, the chairman, for details.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what inflation factor was applied to the funding of the London ambulance service between each of the financial years 1979-80 and 1989-90; and on what basis each was calculated.

Mr. Dorrell: For the years 1979-80 to 1989-90 the Department used the resource allocation working party formula—RAWP—to allocate resources to regions. The allocation included an element for service development and inflation as measured by the gross domestic product deflator. The South West Thames regional health authority has overall responsibility for the London ambulance service. The hon. Member may wish to write to Baroness Cumberlege, the chairman of South West Thames regional health authority, for details.

Smoked Salmon

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish notices in the press explaining the present legal position with regard to the posting of smoked salmon.

Mr. Dorrell: An advertising campaign to raise awareness on the new temperature controls generally is planned for the end of February.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the provisions which apply to the posting of smoked salmon *(a)* in England to European destinations and *(b)* from points in Europe to destinations in England;

(2) what steps he intends to take to intercept smoked salmon being sent into this country by post from Europe.

Mr. Dorrell: The Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990 apply to food businesses in England and Wales. Foods specified in the regulations posted to destinations in Europe are covered by the regulations while in England and Wales. Relevant foods posted in Europe to England and Wales would similarly need to comply with the regulations. Securing compliance with the regulations is a matter for local enforcement agencies.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will delay the implementation of the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990 as they affect smoked salmon, until the results of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food research at Torry are known.

Mr. Dorrell: We shall be considering the Torry research very shortly.

Romanian Babies

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has about Romanian babies being brought into the United Kingdom and subsequently returned to Romania by adults not wishing to pursue adoption procedures.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are not aware of any case where this has happened. Adoption law provides that Romanian children are given the same protection as any other child who is subject to adoption proceedings.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Dorrell: The tables show the official equipment that has been stolen from the Department of Health's London headquarters buildings only, together with its approximate value. The buildings are also occupied by the Department of Social Security's London headquarters staff and the lists include equipment stolen from both Departments' London headquarters. The information for the financial year 1988-89 is not comprehensive, as records were not kept in all buildings at that time.

Period: 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989

Description of item(s)	*Approximate value* £
One calculator	15.00
Two answering machines—at £80 each	160·00
Total	175·00

Period: 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990

Description of item(s)	*Approximate value* £
Eight answering machines—at £65 each	520·00
Five telephones—at £42 each	210·00
One telephone handset	10·00
Three electric fans—at £20 each	60·00
Three video recorders—at £333 each approximately	1,000·00
Two packs of computer ribbons—at £12·50 each	25·00
Nine dictating machines plus tape—at £32 each approximately	290·00
Two paper weights—at £5 each	10·00
Two computers—at £2,000 each	4,000·00
Seven calculators—at £15 each	105·00
One battery	5·00
One extension lead	25·00
One heater	30·00
Total	6,290·00

Period 1 April 1990 to 31 January 1991

Description of item(s)	*Approximate Value* £
Four answering machines at £65 each	260·00
Two loudspeakers at £50 each.	100·00
One mains adaptor	5·00
Three dictaphones at £30 each	90·00
One computer keyboard	150·00
Various computer software	100·00
Two fax machines at £700 each	1,400·00
Three two-way radios + battery charger kit	800·00
Computer hardware tool kit	500·00
Five computers at £2,000 each	10,000·00
Two "Liberator" portable computers at £700 each	1,400·00
Total	£14,805·00

South East Thames RHA

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of major and minor capital projects undertaken or initiated in each district health authority in the South East Thames regional health authority area since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: According to information held centrally, 40 capital projects each costing more than £1 million have been started since 1 January 1980. These are set out in the table. Information on smaller schemes is not held centrally.

District health authority	*Project*
Bexley	Queen Mary's, Sidcup—Extension to Maternity Department Queen Mary's, Sidcup—Pathology
Brighton	Royal Sussex County Boiler House Royal Sussex County Tower Block—Lift/Ass Works RSCH Tower Block South Lift
Bromley	Bassetts Residential Centre MH Services Orpington Phase 1
Camberwell	Crystal Palace (Bowley Close) MH Centre Kings College Hospital—Childrens Ward Kings Day Surgery and Office Accommodation
Canterbury and Thanet	Faversham Hospital Geriatric Wards Isle of Thanet DGH—Margaret Wing Interim Development
Dartford and Gravesham	Archery House—MH Unit
Eastbourne	Crowborough Community Base and Day Hospital Seaford Health Centre Eastbourne New DGH Phase 2
Greenwich	Thamesmead Main Health Centre
Hastings	Hastings DGH Main Phase 1

District health authority	Project
	Hastings DGH Pre-Phase Works
	St. Anne's ESMI Unit
Lewisham and North Southwark	Guys Phase 3 Redevelopment of Engineering Services Facility
	Guys Phase 3 Renal Unit
	Guys Phase 3 Substructure
	Guys Replacement Telephone System
	Lewisham DGH Phase 1A
	Lewisham DGH Phase 1B
Maidstone	Coxheath EMI (John Day House)
	Maidstone DGH Phase 1 (Nucleus)
	Maidstone DGH Phase 1A (Nucleus)
	Maidstone DGH Staff Residences
	Regional Distribution Centre
Medway	Keycol EMI Unit and Day Hospital
	Medway DGH Phase 3B
	Medway DGH Residential
South East Kent	Buckland DGH
	RVH Folkestone Phase 2
	William Harvey
Tunbridge Wells	Kent and Sussex, Phase 1
	Kent and Sussex Phase 2
West Lambeth	St. Thomas' Hospital South Wing

We are building the health service not just for today, but for the next century, so the Government attach the highest priority to improving and modernising health buildings on which about £1 billion will be spent in England this year. Some 470 schemes each costing over £1 million are at various stages of planning, design and construction.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanism there is to link levels of state funding and the quality of care elderly residents can expect.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government determine the amount of aggregate external finance each local authority will receive on the basis of standard spending assessments. It is for each authority to determine its own priorities including appropriate care for the elderly residents it supports.

Liverpool Health Authority (Chairman)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications are required for appointment to the post of chairman of Liverpool health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: Chairmen of health authorities are appointed for the personal skills and experience they can bring to the strategic and management issues facing the authority. They are expected to either live or work or have other links with the community they serve.

General Practitioner Budgets

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of general practitioners who have opted to become budget holders in each district health authority area under the South East Thames regional health authority area, and the number of budget holders as a percentage proportion of the total number of general practitioners in each district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I intend to make a statement to the House on the recognition of general practitioner fundholders throughout the country in the next few weeks. I will then write to my hon. Friend with the detailed information he seeks.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restriction will now apply to the sending of Patum Peperium, a gentleman's relish, and similar products through the post in light of the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The foods covered by temperature controls are listed in the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990, copies of which are available in the Library. Food businesses will need to consider whether their products are required to be temperature controlled or whether the exemptions for foods which have been processed or packaged to prevent the growth of pathogenic micro-organisms at ambient temperatures apply.

Patum Peperium may well have a high enough salt content to prevent the growth of pathogenic micro-organisms without the need for temperature control but this will depend on the particular recipe used and is for the manufacturer to determine.

Pensioners (Sight Tests)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pensioners had sight tests in the year 1988-89 and in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally.

Eggs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, pursuant to his reply of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *162*, he will now recirculate to NHS district general managers a copy of the letter of 31 July 1988 advising against the use of unpasteurised egg in recipes where the egg is unlikely to be cooked thoroughly.

Mr. Dorrell: The existing guidance to all NHS district managers, given in the letter issued on 29 July 1988 remains extant. The Department keeps this matter under regular review and will issue reminders or revised guidance as necessary.

Tobacco

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will raise at the Council of Health Ministers the impact on health in the third world and eastern Europe of the dumping of high tar tobacco produced in the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We will continue to ensure that the health issues arising from the EC tobacco regime are given full consideration in Europe.

NHS Costs

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per ambulance emergency call out, and the average cost per day of an ambulance on non-emergency work for the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The information collected centrally relating to the costs of ambulance services does not allow apportionment between emergency and non-emergency uses.

Immunisation and Cervical Screening

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of general practitioners in each family health services authority received target payments for childhood immunisation and cervical screening in the first six months of 1990-91.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table shows the proportion of GPs in each family health services authority qualifying for target payments at 1 April 1990. GPs received these target payments at the end of September 1990.

Target Payments: By Family Health Services Authority (FHSA)

FHSA Name	*Childhood Immunisation Percentage Qualifying*			*Pre-School Booster Percentage Qualifying*			*Cervical Cytology Percentage Qualifying*		
	Higher Payment	*Lower Payment*	*Total*	*Higher Payment*	*Lower Payment*	*Total*	*Higher Payment*	*Lower Payment*	*Total*
Northern Region									
Cleveland	50	28	78	41	25	66	61	27	88
Cumbria	85	10	95	77	18	95	66	31	97
Durham	67	20	87	61	23	84	53	43	96
Northumberland	91	5	97	90	7	97	87	13	100
Gateshead	45	46	90	38	49	87	43	49	91
Newcastle	48	40	88	29	53	82	57	31	87
North Tyneside	56	20	76	35	21	56	43	51	94
South Tyneside	45	50	95	51	38	89	51	50	100
Sunderland	40	53	93	31	50	81	35	65	100
Yorkshire Region									
Humberside	46	42	88	34	44	78	51	43	94
North Yorkshire	76	14	90	78	11	89	79	19	99
Bradford	42	37	79	34	32	66	48	31	79
Calderdale	63	24	86	49	25	74	70	28	98
Kirklees	39	56	95	33	51	84	77	24	100
Leeds	59	28	87	53	25	78	48	40	87
Wakefield	11	10	21	9	8	17	90	9	99
Trent Region									
Derbyshire	80	18	98	72	25	97	78	21	100
Leicestershire	65	28	93	59	25	84	61	35	96
Lincolnshire	70	25	95	64	26	90	68	30	98
Nottinghamshire	72	20	91	61	27	88	61	29	90
Barnsley	35	65	100	21	75	96	93	8	100
Doncaster	29	53	82	19	49	68	80	18	97
Rotherham	29	57	86	21	48	69	67	22	89
Sheffield	60	28	89	50	29	79	63	31	94
East Anglia Region									
Cambridgeshire	68	27	95	35	54	89	57	32	89
Norfolk	89	7	96	90	6	96	86	12	98
Suffolk	20	4	24	18	6	24	89	12	100
North West Thames Region									
Bedfordshire	75	16	91	61	25	85	73	25	98
Hertfordshire	77	13	90	67	20	88	68	23	91
Barnet	29	33	62	24	29	52	3	59	62
Brent and Harrow	36	17	52	30	15	45	7	45	52
Ealing, Hammersmith, Hounslow	27	33	60	18	23	41	8	39	46
Hillingdon	33	46	79	18	33	51	23	67	89

FHSA Name	Childhood Immunisation Percentage Qualifying			Pre-School Booster Percentage Qualifying			Cervical Cytology Percentage Qualifying		
	Higher Payment	Lower Payment	Total	Higher Payment	Lower Payment	Total	Higher Payment	Lower Payment	Total
Kensington, Chelsea, Westminster	19	8	28	11	14	25	3	17	20
North East Thames Region									
Essex	74	15	89	73	16	89	61	29	90
Barking and Havering	34	38	72	26	36	62	32	70	100
Camden and Islington	13	23	36	5	16	21	1	21	22
City and East London	19	7	26	6	6	12	7	20	27
Enfield and Haringey	31	16	47	30	14	43	26	20	47
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	34	14	48	27	12	39	19	26	45
South East Thames Region									
East Sussex	77	14	92	61	27	88	51	42	93
Kent	76	20	96	57	35	92	43	35	78
Greenwich and Bexley	35	25	60	21	32	53	37	42	79
Bromley	59	19	78	50	9	59	33	65	98
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	21	23	43	13	19	31	10	23	33
South West Thames Region									
Surrey	63	29	93	18	47	65	52	44	96
West Sussex	85	11	96	77	18	95	64	29	94
Croydon	52	26	78	10	41	51	25	53	78
Kingston and Richmond	50	35	85	24	52	76	17	65	82
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	29	29	58	22	22	44	7	41	47
Wessex Region									
Dorset	85	13	98	80	17	97	79	20	99
Hampshire	85	13	98	81	16	98	69	30	98
Wiltshire	59	39	98	53	42	95	83	16	99
Isle of Wight	67	33	100	44	51	96	87	13	100
Oxford Region									
Berkshire	79	16	95	65	24	90	58	40	97
Buckinghamshire	83	7	90	74	15	89	94	5	100
Northamptonshire	86	13	99	58	41	100	78	20	98
Oxfordshire	88	9	97	74	23	97	78	21	99
South Western Region									
Avon	71	21	92	74	13	87	72	26	98
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	77	13	90	89	3	92	77	23	100
Devon	86	13	99	80	14	95	75	26	100
Gloucestershire	74	23	98	60	27	87	89	9	98
Somerset	91	8	99	98	2	100	91	9	100
West Midlands Region									
Hereford and Worcester	66	25	91	66	26	93	81	15	96
Shropshire	53	44	97	48	50	98	76	23	99
Staffordshire	54	31	85	47	32	79	69	33	100
Warwickshire	56	31	88	41	39	80	79	21	100
Birmingham	49	24	73	43	26	69	34	39	73
Conventry	44	41	85	45	22	67	55	34	89
Dudley	53	29	83	70	20	90	55	42	98
Sandwell	37	45	82	29	31	61	23	77	100
Solihull	63	29	91	46	33	79	53	47	100
Walsall	53	24	76	49	18	67	50	46	95
Wolverhampton	17	21	39	9	18	27	25	74	99
Mersey Region									
Cheshire	69	29	97	61	30	91	74	25	99
Liverpool	28	26	54	14	13	27	15	80	96
St. Helens and Knowsley	44	33	77	28	21	50	21	77	98
Sefton	56	29	85	47	28	75	40	54	94
Wirral	63	26	88	63	18	80	41	59	100
North Western Region									
Lancashire	49	30	79	60	23	83	48	38	87
Bolton	37	39	77	26	47	73	49	47	96
Bury	60	33	94	63	24	87	70	27	97
Manchester	10	40	50	4	6	10	13	57	70
Oldham	54	38	92	22	34	56	47	46	92
Rochdale	51	34	85	35	33	67	52	40	92
Salford	27	51	78	8	31	39	38	59	98
Stockport	70	28	97	59	34	93	61	36	98
Tameside	31	50	81	21	64	85	68	24	92
Trafford	63	26	90	46	35	81	64	32	97
Wigan	14	18	32	4	10	14	59	39	98

FHSA Name	Childhood Immunisation Percentage Qualifying			Pre-School Booster Percentage Qualifying			Cervical Cytology Percentage Qualifying		
	Higher Payment	Lower Payment	Total	Higher Payment	Lower Payment	Total	Higher Payment	Lower Payment	Total
England	59	23	82	50	25	75	56	32	88

Note:
Figures for higher and lower payments may not add to TOTAL because of rounding error.

For childhood immunisations, the higher target—£1,737 per annum for the average list size—is paid for 90 per cent. coverage and the lower target—£579—for 70 per cent. coverage. The necessary coverage levels are the same for the pre-school booster targets—the higher target is worth £579 and the lower target £193. For cervical cancer screening, the higher target—£2,202—necessitates 80 per cent. coverage and the lower target—£734—necessitates 50 per cent. coverage.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per pint of blood used in the health service in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Blood is donated by volunteer donors and no charge is made to NHS hospitals for it. The average cost of collecting, processing and transporting a unit of blood in 1989-90 was £29·25.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost *(a)* per general practitioner appointment and *(b)* per general practitioner home visit, in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost in the last year for which figures are available for the supply of a new *(a)* general hospital, *(b)* ambulance, *(c)* general practitioner surgery, *(d)* dental surgery and *(e)* prescription.

Mr. Dorrell: The average gross cost of a prescription dispensed by community pharmacists or dispensing doctors in England in 1989-90 was £6·36. For the other items mentioned, the cost will vary according to the specification adopted and no meaningful average cost can be given.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in the last year for which figures are available, what is the average cost to the taxpayer per adult and per child visit to the dentist; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Data are collected centrally only on numbers of courses of treatment, not individual patient visits. The estimated average cost of an NHS adult course of treatment in England in 1989-90, net of patient charges, was £18. The estimated average cost of a course of treatment for a child in the same period was £17.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per adult and per child patient for treatment by general practitioner and hospital service for asthma for the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Electoral Statistics

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the largest, smallest and average electorate for constituencies in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Scotland.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the table in respect of the 1990 electoral registers.

	Parliamentary electors (1990)
England	
Largest constituency: Milton Keynes	109,839
Average size of 523 constituencies	69,577
Smallest constituency: Surbiton	43,607
Wales	
Largest constituency: Pembroke	72,981
Average size of 38 constituencies	58,093
Smallest constituency: Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	32,805
Northern Ireland	
Largest constituency: East Londonderry	75,407
Average size of 17 constituencies	66,506
Smallest constituency: Belfast South	53,516
Scotland	
Largest constituency: Gordon	77,974
Average size of 72 constituencies	54,676
Smallest constituency: Western Isles	23,084

Numbers on the 1991 registers are currently being collected from electoral registration officers.

GPs (Deprived Area Payments)

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is satisfied with the working of the special deprived area payments for general practitioners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* We are satisfied that our policy objective of targeting the payments on those practices that service areas of highest deprivation is being met. We have received a number of representations about the scheme and we have agreed that officials will discuss these with the British Medical Association.

Hospital Food

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has issued any guidance about the introduction of charging patients for food in hospital trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* No. The provision of meals to NHS hospital in-patients is not subject to compulsory charges. Hospitals may offer a wider choice of menu and charge for the additional services provided.

SCOTLAND

Flat-finding Agencies

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider licensing flat-finding agents or take other steps to ensure that they are suitable people to conduct this work.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I do not believe such action to be necessary.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the activities of Lothian Rentals flat-finding agency in Edinburgh and their implications for the law governing the regulations of such activities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have received no such representations.

Clinical Physics and Bioengineering

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the percentage change in the salary costs as a result of the change to the medical technical officer grade in those staff administered by the Department of Clinical Physics and Bioengineering, West Graham street, Glasgow; and what are the equivalent figures for those staff in Lothian, Fife, Grampian and Tayside health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The costs of introducing the medical technical officer grade arose from the transfer of staff to a common pay spine and from the assignment of individuals to particular grades within the new structure following local review. These costs are not available centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate costs.

Housing Finance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the housing support grant for Renfrew district council for each year since 1975.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

	£ million
[1]1979-80	6·5
1980-81	6·6
1981-82	2·2
1982-83	—
1983-84	—
1984-85	—
1985-86	—
1986-87	—
1987-88	—
1988-89	—
1989-90	—
1990-91	—
1991-92	[2]0·0285

[1] Exchequer subsidy in the form of housing support grant became payable from 1979-80.

[2] Housing support grant for 1991-92 relates to the estimated deficit on hostel running costs during the year.

Council House Sales

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration is being given to undertaking a ministerial review of the long-term consequences of the right to buy provision in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office is to conduct a new research study to evaluate the impact of the right to buy. The study will be carried out over an 18-month period and will update previous research carried out into this subject. We will consider any policy implications of the findings in due course.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the current percentage rate of disposal of public sector tenancies to owner-occupation under the right-to-buy provisions shown by each local authority housing area in Scotland;

(2) how many properties have been sold in Scotland under the right-to-buy provisions, shown by each local authority housing area in Scotland, indicating the percentage of the public sector stock tenancies remaining under management of each housing authority.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table gives details of sales made under the right-to-buy legislation. The second column shows the percentage of stock sold since October 1980, and the third column shows the component of that percentage represented by sales in 1990. Information is not held centrally about the management arrangements for public sector stock.

Right to Buy Sales by public sector housing agency—Scotland

	Number of sales October 1980 to September 1990	*Percentage of stock at 30 September 1980 sold*	*of which in 1990*
SCOTLAND	198,925	19·1	2·5
LOCAL AUTHORITY	150,520	16·8	2·4
Borders			
Berwickshire	665	23·3	1·6
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,215	24·4	1·8
Roxburgh	1,255	20·0	1·4
Tweeddale	374	23·0	1·2
Central			
Clackmannan	1,794	18·7	2·4
Falkirk	6,420	19·1	2·0
Stirling	2,621	20·0	2·7
Dumfries and Galloway			

	Number of sales October 1980 to September 1990	Percentage of stock at 30 September 1980 sold	of which in 1990
Annandale and Eskdale[1]	1,284	25·0	1·9
Nithsdale	2,138	24·6	1·9
Stewartry	745	28·7	1·7
Wigtown	1,103	23·1	1·7
Fife			
Dunfermline	5,945	25·5	2·3
Kirkcaldy	5,852	22·2	2·2
North East Fife	2,703	33·5	1·8
Grampian			
Aberdeen	5,358	13·8	1·8
Banff and Buchan	2,859	22·3	1·6
Gordon	1,529	25·0	1·4
Kincardine and Deeside	788	21·6	1·3
Moray	2,839	25·9	2·1
Highland			
Badenoch and Strathspey	415	38·1	5·3
Caithness	847	19·6	0·9
Inverness	1,497	21·0	2·3
Lochaber	752	21·5	2·3
Nairn	260	23·4	2·0
Ross and Cromarty	901	14·2	1·4
Skye and Lochalsh	182	24·9	2·1
Sutherland	272	15·7	0·8
Lothian			
East Lothian	4,043	24·8	2·4
Edinburgh	11,951	21·2	3·6
Midlothian	3,384	25·6	2·6
West Lothian	3,588	16·2	2·1
Strathclyde			
Argyll and Bute	1,379	16·4	2·4
Bearsden and Milngavie	280	15·3	1·9
Clydebank	2,086	17·6	4·2
Clydesdale	1,361	14·0	1·7
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	814	18·5	2·6
Cumnock and Doon Valley[2]	1,353	13·1	1·5
Cunninghame	3,821	16·7	2·5
Dumbarton	1,619	12·3	2·0
East Kilbride[2]	442	27·2	1·4
Eastwood	503	25·2	2·4
Glasgow	16,939	9·7	2·5
Hamilton	3,996	17·4	3·2
Inverclyde	2,024	10·2	1·2
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	2,704	14·8	1·6
Kyle and Carrick	4,339	24·0	3·1
Monklands	3,577	12·5	2·8
Motherwell	4,171	10·4	2·2
Renfrew	6,747	17·1	2·2
Strathkelvin	2,505	22·7	2·1
Tayside			
Angus	3,101	21·3	2·5
Dundee	5,785	14·4	4·2
Perth and Kinross	3,884	23·7	3·2
Islands Councils			
Orkney Islands	396	26·2	2·2
Shetland Islands	402	16·1	1·2
Western Isles	653	26·4	0·9
New Town			
Cumbernauld[3]	0	0·0	0·0
East Kilbride	7,927	44·1	4·2
Glenrothes	3,627	39·6	3·1
Irvine	1,370	31·1	4·7
Livingston	3,505	32·6	5·0
SCOTTISH HOMES (SSHA)[4]	31,976	34·4	2·4

[1] Return outstanding for quarter 1 1982.
[2] Returns outstanding for quarter 3 1990.
[3] All sales have been voluntary sales.
[4] Includes voluntary sales.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of public sector tenanted housing stock below which the provisions of the right to buy would make sensible local authority strategic management of housing impossible to achieve.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such level has been set.

Rented Housing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the total number of houses for rent built by Scottish Homes or its predecessor within Renfrew district for each year since 1960.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

New House Building 1960-1990—Scottish Homes (Own Stock)

Year	Number of completions
1960-61	Nil
1962	750
1963	540
1964-65	Nil
1966	1,448
1967-68	Nil
1969	367
1970	126
1971	Nil
1972	916
1973	925
1974	Nil
1975	440
1976	432
1977	364
1978	460
1979	632
1980	Nil
1981	268
1982	Nil
1983	209
1984-86	Nil
1987	18
1988	72
1989-90	Nil
1991	24

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the total number of houses for rent built by Renfrew district council or its predecessors for each year since 1960.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total numbers of dwellings completed by Renfrew district council for the years 1976 to 1990 are set out in the table. It is not possible to say whether all these were for rent. Information for earlier years is not available on a comparable basis.

New dwellings completed by Renfrew district council

	Number
1976	184
1977	84
1978	47
1979	65
1980	122
1981	113
1982	179
1983	34
1984	135
1985	19
1986	10
1987	64
1988	27
1989	—
[1]1990	—

[1] January to September only.

Homelessness

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to review or amend any provisions of the Homeless Persons (Scotland) Act; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no current plans to review or amend further the provisions of part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. But I expect to issue soon a revised code of guidance on the homelessness legislation in Scotland, to which local authorities are to have regard in exercising their homelessness functions.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average length of stay for families with dependent children, who were accepted as homeless by their local authority, and placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, in 1990 or at the nearest available date; and if he will express the answer in terms of the average length of stay for Scotland and for each district and islands council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many families with dependent children were accepted as homeless in 1990, or at the nearest available date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: According to returns so far submitted by local authorities to the Scottish Office, they accepted 9,900 households with dependent children as homeless in 1989-90. Some returns are known to be outstanding.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many families with dependent children, accepted as homeless by their local authority, were placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in 1990 or at the nearest available date; and if he will express the answer in terms of the total number for Scotland and for each district and islands council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Returns so far submitted by local authorities to the Scottish Office indicate that in 1989-90 they placed 670 households with dependent children, whom they had accepted as homeless, in bed and breakfast accommodation temporarily pending inquiries under the legislation, and 166 in such accommodation following assessment. Some households may be included in both these figures, which represent less

than 7 per cent. and less than 2 per cent. respectively of the number of households with dependent children accepted as homeless in 1989-90. A breakdown by district and islands council is set out in the table. Some returns are known to be outstanding.

Households with dependant children accepted as homeless, Scotland, 1989-90 found bed and breakfast accommodation, by local authority

Local authority	Temporarily pending inquiries	Following assessment
Scotland	670	166
Borders		
Berwickshire	—	—
Ettrick & Lauderdale	—	—
Roxburgh	—	—
Tweeddale	1	—
Central		
Clackmannan	1	—
Falkirk	4	1
Stirling	7	1
Dumfries & Galloway		
Annandale & Eskdale	—	—
Nithsdale	—	—
Stewartry	4	—
Wigtown	12	—
Fife		
Dunfermline	—	1
Kirkcaldy	13	2
North East Fife	8	1
Grampian		
Aberdeen	42	36
Banff & Buchan	7	—
Gordon	9	—
Kincardine & Deeside	3	1
Moray	4	—
Highland		
Badenoch & Strathspey	—	1
Caithness	—	—
Inverness	2	—
Lochaber	8	1
Nairn	—	—
Ross & Cromarty	6	—
Skye & Lochalsh	6	—
Sutherland	—	—
Lothian		
East Lothian	35	1
Edinburgh	3	—
Midlothian	23	36
West Lothian	32	26
Strathclyde		
Argyll & Bute	21	6
Bearsden & Milngavie	1	—
Clydebank	5	1
Clydesdale	—	—
Cumbernauld & Kilsyth	28	11
Cumnock & Doon Valley	5	—
Cunninghame	93	11
Dumbarton	14	—
East Kilbride	—	1
Eastwood	4	4
Glasgow	19	3
Hamilton	2	2
Inverclyde	—	—
Kilmarnock & Loudoun	32	—
Kyle & Carrick	114	9
Monklands	1	—
Motherwell	1	—
Renfrew	69	—
Strathkelvin	19	2
Tayside		
Angus	—	5
Dundee	8	—
Perth & Kinross	—	1
Islands Councils		
Orkney Islands	—	—
Shetland Islands	1	1
Western Isles	3	1

Mental Illness

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients receiving treatment for mental illness in Scottish hospitals were eligible to vote in 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not available.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to assist long-term patients receiving treatment for mental illness in Scottish hospitals to exercise their right to vote in local and parliamentary elections.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Guidance to health boards relating to the electoral registration of informal patients in mental illness and mental handicap hospitals was last issued in 1987 and the need for further guidance is kept under review. Explanatory leaflets for patients are distributed within relevant hospitals and informal patients are given the opportunity prior to 10 October each year to complete the necessary patient's declaration form.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from the Lord Advocate's Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no such losses.

New Housing

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total levels of new housebuilding, houses completed, in each year from 1970 to 1979 and in 1989 in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested for the years 1970 to 1978 was given on page 8 of "Scottish Housing Statistics No. 12, 4th Quarter 1980". Figures for 1979 and 1989 appear in table 5 of the Scottish Office quarterly statistical bulletins on housing. These publications are available in the House Library.

Mortgages

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the total volume of mortgage lending in Scotland in real terms in each year since 1970.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available.

City Hospital, Aberdeen

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the tender value of the private medical company for the 60-bed geriatric unit at the City hospital in Aberdeen; and what was the value of the nearest unsuccessful tender.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* The successful tender was valued at £2,356,000. The nearest unsuccessful tender was received from a second private company and the value of its tender is commercially confidential. Grampian health board has explained to both that company and the in-house team the reasons why they were unsuccessful.

Higher Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what numbers of students attended the centrally funded education institutions in 1989-90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* In 1989-90 a total of 29,871 full-time and 10,508 part-time higher education students attended institutions which are centrally funded by the Scottish Office Education Department. Provisional figures show an additional 184 full-time and 22,953 part-time students attending non-advanced courses in these institutions in 1989-90.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of the relaxation of the attendance allowance rule for terminally ill people since its inception.

Mr. Scott: Provisions introduced with effect from 1 October 1990, enable anyone with a terminal illness to qualify for attendance allowance at the higher rate from the date of claim. Up to 31 December 1990 a total of 13,600 claims were decided under these provisions and of these decisions over 13,000 were successful. The majority of such claims were cleared within two weeks.

Local Offices, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will review the level of funding of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area, in the light of changing demand;

(2) what plans he has to alter the work load and staffing at each of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department allocates funds for staffing and administrative expenditure to local offices using systems designed to match resources to requirements. Staffing is based on workload which local offices record each month, and resource managers take account of revised workload forecasts when reviewing local office complements. Expenditure is reviewed centrally and locally each month.

The Department's offices in Doncaster are being combined to form one administrative unit for management purposes. The staffing for 1991-92 will encompass the combined complement from the two existing offices.

Pension Ages

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the cost of equalising pension ages for men and women for *(a)* retirement pension and *(b)* income support pensioner premiums; and how these estimates would differ if (i) spouse additions and (ii) widow/widower pensions were paid on the same basis on male and female pensions at (1) 65 years, (2) 60 years or (3) 55 years.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of paying state retirement pension to men from age 60 has been estimated at about £3,000 million a year in 1985-86 prices. Paying pensions to women from age 65 has been estimated to save about £500 million in 1985-86 prices. Income support pensioner premiums are payable to men and women at age 60. The cost of providing State pensions to men and women at age 55 and the further information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Residential Homes

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what information he obtained about the supply and demand of places in residential and nursing homes for the elderly before the setting of income support levels;

(2) what information he obtained about dependency levels in residential homes for the elderly before setting income support levels;

(3) what information he obtained about charges for extras in residential and nursing homes for the elderly before the setting of income support levels;

(4) what information he obtained about differences in staff costs between residential and nursing homes for the elderly before the setting of income support levels;

(5) what information he obtained about regional variations in charges in residential and nursing homes for the elderly before the setting of income support levels.

Miss Widdecombe: A considerable amount of information, including all these issues, received from various interested parties as well as information from a survey commissioned by the Department, and carried out by management consultants Price Waterhouse, was considered before the income support limits were set for residential care and nursing homes. A copy of the Price Waterhouse report has been placed in the Library. Information about occupancy of homes is obtained from quarterly statistical returns.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Jack: The information in the table relates to the number of break-ins in offices other than London

headquarters, which is the responsibility of the Department of Health. Further information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	Number of break-ins	Estimated value of equipment £
1987-88	90	[1]
1988-89	54	[1]
1989-90	85	32,000

[1] No records held.

State Pensions

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the state pension entitlement for *(a)* single persons and *(b)* married couples as of April 1991; and if he will show comparable figures for April 1979 and indicate the change in real and nominal terms.

Miss Widdecombe: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 24 October last year, basic retirement pension from April 1991 will be £52 for a single person and £83·25 for a married couple. The amounts paid in April 1979 were £19·50 and £31·20 respectively. The nominal change in the level of benefit over this period is therefore £32·50 for a single person and £52·05 for a married couple. Measurement of the change in the real value of benefit over this period cannot be calculated until the retail prices index for April 1991 is available.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *196*, concerning the value of benefits in November 1979 and April 1991, if he will give the answer using the index of retail prices which applies to the annual uprating of benefits in April 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 6 December 1990 at column *196*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he would list for each of the benefits for which he is responsible the statutory duties which lie upon his Department to encourage greater take-up of each benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 7 February 1991.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number and proportion of claimants who are disqualified for unemployment benefit, and of these, the number and proportion who are in receipt of reduced income support.

Mr. Jack: The latest information at May 1989 shows that of the 1,090,631 income support claimants registered as available for employment 31,574—2·9 per cent.—were receiving reduced income support because of disqualification or disallowance. Other information on numbers of unemployed claimants and the decisions of adjudication officers is in "Unemployment Benefit Statistics—Quarterly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants" and "Unemployment Benefit Statistics—Quarterly Analysis of Decisions of Adjudication Officers", copies of which are in the Library.

Welfare Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assistance and support his Department has given to local authority welfare rights teams since 1979; and what further help is planned.

Mr. Jack: The Department welcomes the existence of welfare rights advisers and encourages co-operation at a local level between such advisers and departmental staff.

Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners claim income support; and what this is as a percentage of all pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: In May 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, 1,552,000 pensioners received income support. This was 15 per cent. of all pensioners.

Sources:

Annual statistical inquiry May 1989 for income support recipients.

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for population figures.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners are wholly dependent upon the state pension for their income; and what is this as a percentage of all pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: Income-related benefits are available to help people whose only income is the basic state retirement pension, although a few do not claim their full entitlement. Available information suggests that less than 1 per cent. of people over state pension age receive only the basic state retirement pension and no other state benefits or private income. It is not possible to estimate precisely the total number of pensioners in this position.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payments have been made under the severe weather payments system in each area covered by the relevant weather station for each week since mid-January.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision he proposes for those currently assisted by the independent living fund after its abolition in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Our plans for the future of the independent living fund are still under consideration following the decision to phase the implementation of community care.

Social Fund

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people within the last year applied for *(a)* a crisis loan, *(b)* a budgeting loan and *(c)* a community care grant from social fund, Merseyside; how many were subsequently awarded payment in each of the stated categories; how many people were refused help and for what reasons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The information requested is given in the following tables:

Table A
Crisis Loans
YTD figures for month ending December 1990

Local office	*Number of applications*	*Number of awards*	*Number of refusals*
Belle Vale	705	642	10
Bootle	1,017	919	64
Breckfield	1,677	1,540	86
City	1,426	1,289	28
Crosby	837	804	18
Edgehill	1,990	1,832	63
Garston	707	435	132
Huyton	1,308	1,241	24
Kirkby	1,159	1,121	27
Norris Green	734	672	36
Toxteth	3,096	2,419	127
West Derby	411	410	3
TOTAL	15,067	13,324	618

Table B
Budgeting Loans
YTD figures for month ending December 1990

Local office	*Number of applications*	*Number of awards*	*Number of refusals*
Belle Vale	2,576	1,521	907
Bootle	3,380	2,095	1,061
Breckfield	3,929	2,093	1,489
City	2,320	1,387	711
Crosby	2,353	1,312	889
Edgehill	4,004	2,222	1,452
Garston	1,692	1,058	562
Huyton	3,961	2,606	1,084
Kirkby	4,241	2,474	1,354
Norris Green	2,271	1,310	814
Toxteth	4,301	2,435	1,450
West Derby	886	582	288
TOTAL	35,914	21,095	12,061

Table C
Community care grants
YTD figures for month ending December 1990

Local office	*Number of applications*	*Number of awards*	*Number of refusals*
Belle Vale	1,061	456	575
Bootle	1,514	620	866
Breckfield	1,901	649	1,157

Local office	Number of applications	Number of awards	Number of refusals
City	1,166	439	633
Crosby	1,181	427	719
Edgehill	1,898	632	1,209
Garston	872	301	519
Huyton	1,804	675	1,089
Kirkby	2,031	689	1,223
Norris Green	1,131	422	706
Toxteth	2,328	680	1,478
West Derby	490	240	240
Total	17,377	6,230	10,414

Table D
Reason for refusal—crisis loans[1]

	Belle Vale	Bootle	Breckfield	City	Crosby	Edgehill	Garston	Edgehill	Kirkby	Norris Green	Toxteth	West Derby
Excluded items	0	0	3	0	1	2	0	2	1	1	0	0
Previous application and SFO decision for item	1	0	2	1	0	4	1	1	1	0	11	0
Inability to repay	2	2	8	6	1	13	0	6	0	3	16	0
Help available from another source	0	2	9	3	2	1	1	1	0	6	10	0
Insufficient priority	0	0	2	0	2	2	2	0	9	3	31	1
Suitable alternative available	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	2	0
No serious risk to health or safety	3	44	46	8	13	35	125	10	8	20	54	1
Other	6	21	22	10	3	12	5	8	8	11	17	1

[1] An application may have more than one reason for a refusal decision. Therefore the sum total of reasons for refusal will be greater than the number of applications actually refused.

Table E
Reasons for refusal by local office—BLs[1]

	Belle Vale	Bootle	Breckfield	City	Crosby	Edgehill	Garston	Edgehill	Kirkby	Norris Green	Toxteth	West Derby
Not in receipt of Income Support	117	109	244	102	115	181	66	144	172	84	142	41
Not in receipt of Income Support for 26 weeks	195	250	317	168	191	298	90	261	233	190	266	41
Excluded items	40	41	54	24	42	62	13	42	25	20	62	7
Previous application and SFO decision for item	81	59	86	38	42	120	26	67	88	90	142	6
Inability to repay	17	46	94	45	20	94	22	84	81	85	133	15
Insufficient priority	438	480	563	97	335	663	246	416	643	397	624	131
Loan refused CCG awarded	73	33	106	60	94	88	66	41	84	40	95	32
Other	32	95	120	190	162	76	118	71	118	59	112	7

[1] An application may have more than one reason for a refusal decision. Therefore the sum total of reasons for refusal will be greater than the number of applications actually refused.

Table F
Reasons for refusal by local office—CCGs[1]

	Belle Vale	Bootle	Breckfield	City	Crosby	Edgehill	Garston	Edgehill	Kirkby	Norris Green	Toxteth	West Derby
Savings over £500 sufficient to meet cost	6	3	1	0	4	4	4	4	0	2	2	0
Not in receipt of IS and unlikely to become entitled	73	78	165	98	85	148	68	127	141	59	149	24
Excluded items	18	20	27	7	20	33	13	16	15	17	26	6
Excluded person	14	2	4	0	1	0	1	19	5	1	2	2
Amount less than £30 (not travel)	4	12	6	4	8	4	3	3	7	5	5	1
Previous application and decision for item	34	37	48	18	30	66	21	41	62	66	97	7
Insufficient priority	62	78	168	27	10	10	149	146	58	64	274	185
Secretary of State direction 4 not satisfied	377	529	768	450	540	794	348	742	892	499	877	18
Other	16	144	73	26	46	42	107	24	59	63	72	1

[1] An application may have more than one reason for a refusal decision. Therefore the sum total of reasons for refusal may be greater than the number of applications actually refused.

Community Charge Benefit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average number of families who received rate rebates or community charge benefit in each year from 1980 to 1990 in the categories of *(a)* retirement pensioners, *(b)* invalidity pensioners, *(c)* unemployed, *(d)* lone parents, *(e)* students, *(f)* single people and *(g)* families in paid work.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 29 January 1991]*: The table shows the number of households, including single people, receiving rate rebates or community charge benefit, broken down into such categories as are available. Figures are not available prior to 1983, as the housing benefit scheme did not then exist in its present form.

(Thousands)

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Elderly[1]	3,870	3,920	3,920	3,720	3,690	3,015	2,550
Invalidity pensioners[2]						200	190
Unemployed[3]						885	615
Lone parents	2,680	2,880	2,890	3,020	3,090	635	555
Students						640	70
Others							565

[1] Data on elderly people relates to women aged 60 or over and men aged 65 or over for 1983 to 1987, and all claimants aged 60 and over for 1988 and 1989.

[2] Aged 60 to 79 and who qualify for higher pensioner premium.
[3] Not including cases where neither income support nor unemployment benefit are in payment.
Notes:
(1) The available figures relate to a combination of data on income support and non-income support cases. The income support data relates to statistical inquiries carried out in May of each year. The non-income support data relate to those carried out in September of each year except 1984 (October) and 1988 and 1989 (May).
(2) Data on community charge rebates in Scotland for 1989 and community charge benefit in Great Britain as a whole for 1990 are not available. The 1989 figures shown, therefore, relate to England and Wales only.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Procedural Changes

45. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress has been made in respect of the proposed procedural changes in the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacGregor: A number of procedural changes have been made over the past year or so on matters including private Members' time and oral questions.

The Procedure Committee is continuing its work and I am hopeful that its inquiry into parliamentary questions will provide the basis for further improvements. In addition, I remain willing to receive ideas from Members for improvements in our procedures, including those which will reduce costs.

Security

46. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a further statement on security within the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. MacGregor: It has been the long-standing practice of Leaders of the House not to comment on matters of security within the Palace of Westminster. I can however reassure my hon. Friend that the matter is kept under continuing review, and I am sure that he has noticed some considerable changes recently.

European Parliament

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent discussions there have been concerning the improvement of communications facilities between the House and the European Parliament.

Mr. MacGregor: The question of establishing easier telecommunications and postal links with institutions of the European Communities, including the European Council, is expected to be considered at the next meeting of the Services Committee on 13 February.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. MacGregor: No equipment has been reported stolen from the Privy Council office in the last three years.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Duchy (Official Visit)

29. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to pay an official visit to the duchy.

Mr. Chris Patten: I recently attended a meeting of the Knowsley magisterial advisory committee on Merseyside, and I hope to pay another visit to the duchy in the near future.

34. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will next make an official visit to the duchy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have no precise plans to make an official visit to the duchy at present, although I hope to do so in the near future. I recently visited the Knowsley magisterial advisory committee and was very impressed by its businesslike approach to the difficult and responsible job it has in finding candidates who are entirely suitable for the important judicial appointment of justice of the peace.

Duchy Business

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much time he has spent on duchy business since he last answered oral questions.

Mr. Chris Patten: Up to a quarter of my time is spent carrying out my duties as Chancellor of the Duchy.

Duchy Land Holdings

36. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will commission an environmental assessment of the duchy and of all its land holdings.

Mr. Chris Patten: Management of the duchy estates is conducted by professionally qualified people, who take into active consideration the effect upon the environment of any decisions which they recommend. The range of such decisions extends from the control of pollution to concern for the impact on the environment of any new development on the duchy's land holdings. I do not, therefore, consider any further environmental assessment necessary.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Ministry in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Curry: All cases of theft from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during the last three years

for which information is available and for which authority has been granted to write off the loss incurred are shown in the following table:

Year and detail	Amount £
1987-88	
Beekeeping equipment	58·00
Binoculars (2)	232·00
Electronic typewriter	491·11
Pen set	71·93
Compass (2)	30·98
Pencil sharpeners	10·00
Strimmer	228·00
Trailer board	50·00
Club hammer	20·00
Hairdryer	8·99
Beckman rota	4,800·00
Grundig stenorettes	440·00
Calculators (3)	27·45
Stylon tape	20·00
Optical square	10·00
Cassette recorder	50·00
Tripod	35·00
Total 1987-88	£6,583·46
1988-89	
Spare wheel (and tyre)	58·19
Bird scarer	242·00
Step ladders	20·00
Patio set	60·00
Aluminium irrigation equipment	1,955·00
Binoculars	24·99
Calculator	10·13
Pocket dictaphone	47·25
Total 1988-89	£2,417·56
1989-90	
Tool box	220·00
Calculator	25·00
TV and cassette radio	99·99
Video camera	800·00
Land rover	7,830·00
Scales	20·00
Hotplate	30·00
Dictaphone	60·38
Total 1989-90	£9,085·37
Total 1987-90	£18,086·39

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any restriction is placed by the EC on the tar levels of tobaccos exported to the third world.

Mr. Curry: No. The specification of tobacco exports is a matter for commercial decision between buyer and seller.

Agricultural Expenditure

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has submitted to the Council of Ministers about the reduction of agricultural spending to be submitted to the GATT conference; and if he will place his proposals in the Library.

Mr. Curry: The Commission negotiates in the GATT in close consultation with member states on the basis of the offer which the Council of Ministers approved in November. We have not submitted proposals to the Council but with other member states have urged the Commission to continue the effort to find a basis for a successful agreement.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out the reasons why the EC has decided to budget for the expenditure of £23,000,000,000 on agriculture in 1991; what is the legal limit for such expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The agreed budget for total EC agriculture expenditure in 1991, including estimated costs arising from German unification, is now 34,785 mecu (£24,240 million). This excludes the 1,000 mecu (£697 million) monetary reserve, which is a provision for increased costs above 400 mecu (£279 million) caused by movements in the dollar/ecu market rate. The budget was based on estimates made last year. Within this total, the budget for market support is 31,516 mecu (£21,962 million) which is subject to a legal limit (the guideline) of 32,511 mecu (£22,656 million).

Tobacco

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total sum which the EC proposes to spend on the production of tobacco in 1991; and if he will provide separate figures for the proposed spending on storing and on subsidising the export of such tobacco, giving in each case the comparable expenditure figures in 1990 and 1989, respectively.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is shown in the table below:

	1989 Outturn		*1990 Provisional outturn*		*1991 EC budget provision*	
	MECU	*£ million*	*MECU*	*£ million*	*MECU*	*£ million*
Total	1,138·849	745·66	1,232·134	858·68	1,341	934·55
Of which						
Export refunds	61·961	40·57	61·869	43·12	69	48·09
Intervention	104·573	68·47	89·425	62·32	137	95·48

Sources: 1989—19th Financial Guarantee Report.
1990—Consumption of Credits Doc VI/440/90.
1991—Consumption of Credits Doc VI/101/91.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the fiscal effect on United Kingdom farmers of the Agriculture Council's decision to bring producers' direct sales of yogurt, ice cream and certain other milk products within the scope of Community rules on milk quotas.

Mr. Curry: Producers whose direct sales of milk and milk products exceed their available quota are subject to a supplementary levy of up to 15·7 pence per litre of milk at the current rate. From 1 April 1991 direct sales of yogurt, ice cream and certain other milk products will be taken into account in determining liability for this levy. We are considering how and on what terms to make quota available to producers directly affected by the Council's decision.

Sheep and Cow Subsidies

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the sheep subsidy and hill cow payments will be made; what delays there have been in payment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to the replies of 18 January and 31 January 1990]:* My right hon. Friends and I have now completed the annual review of the economic conditions in the United Kingdom's less-favoured areas, in consultation with representatives of farming interests. The review has shown that average net farm incomes of livestock producers in our hill and upland areas are forecast to fall even further in 1990-91 following the significant decline also experienced in the previous year.

We have concluded that, in response to the exceptionally difficult circumstances faced by producers, there should be increases in all the rates for hill livestock compensatory allowances but with larger increases for the sectors in greatest difficulty.

Subject to parliamentary approval the new rates will be as follows:

	Severely disadvantaged area		*Disadvantaged area*	
	New rate £	*Existing rate* £	*New rate* £	*Existing rate* £
Cows	63·30	54·50	31·65	27·25
Hardy breed ewes	8·75	7·50	n/a	n/a
Other ewes	4·90	4·50	2·45	2·25

The new financial limit of 1·4 livestock units per hectare comes into effect from 1 January 1991 and will limit payments to those producers who stock above this level. There will be no other changes to the conditions of the scheme.

We shall be laying before Parliament a draft Statutory Instrument giving effect to the new rates as soon as possible. The increased rates are expected to cost £17·5 million in a full year.

This 14 per cent. average increase, which follows an increase for hardy breed ewes worth over £5 million last year will bring HLCA payments in the United Kingdom to some £142 million in a full scheme year.

All sectors of agriculture face a period of change. There is the need to adapt to new market requirements and to find support arrangements which pose a less severe budgetary burden and reflect environmental concerns more effectively. No sector can be exempt from change. But this substantial and increased level of support indicates the Government's continuing commitment to livestock farming in the less favoured areas with the additional contribution it brings in ensuring economic activity in these difficult areas and in providing environmental benefits.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 February 1991

TRANSPORT

Bus and Rail Travellers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact on bus and rail travellers in Greater London of the reduction in transport facilities recently announced by London Regional Transport.

Mr. Freeman: London Buses Limited has announced that it is planning to make a number of alterations to local bus services to match them more closely to passenger demand. Details of all the proposed services are not yet available; they will be the subject of public consultation over the next few months. I understand that the changes that London Underground is developing are mainly reduced counter services at booking offices, made possible by the introduction in recent years of very reliable new ticket machines. I am advised that the changes to train services envisaged by London Underground are modest and are, in the main, aimed at improving reliability on lines where there are problems in providing a full complement of trains.

Halifax-Huddersfield Rail Link

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will allocate funds to ensure that the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority is able to introduce in 1992 the railway link between Halifax and Huddersfield.

Mr. McLoughlin: If the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority seeks resources for this project, we will consider it on its merits, and taking account of the claims of other projects. Credit approvals for 1991-92 have, however, already been allocated, so the earliest that resources for new projects could be made available is 1992-93.

A45

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many separate traffic engineering projects have been undertaken for the purpose of improving Rookery crossroads on the A45 over the past 10 years; how much this has cost in 1990 values; and whether he has any proposals for futher works;

(2) what steps he is taking, together with the Suffolk county council, to help prevent further accidents at Rookery crossroads on the A45; and how soon he expects to publish plans for grade separation of Sow lane traffic entering and exiting Rougham industrial estate and east-west traffic on the A45.

Mr. Chope: There have been six engineering projects costing approximately £50,000 to 1990 prices. I shall write to my hon. Friend with details of proposals for further works.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of injury accidents on or near the A45 at the Rookery crossroads at Rougham near Bury St. Edmunds in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Chope: The number of recorded fatal, serious and slight injury accidents at or within 20m either side of the junction in each of the past 10 years is as follows:

Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
1980	—	—	1	1
1981	—	1	—	1
1982	—	2	—	2
1983	—	3	—	3
1984	—	—	1	1
1985	—	1	—	1
1986	—	—	1	1
1987	—	1	—	1
1988	—	1	1	2
1989	—	1	5	6
1990	1	—	1	2

Rail Electrification

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his decision on rail electrification of the Western Region main line west of Reading.

Mr. McLoughlin: British Rail has no current plans for electrification of the main line west of Reading.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 4 February 1991 *Official Report*, column *4*, whether he will consult the chairman of British Rail in relation to the United Kingdom's participation in the European Commission high level working group with respect to low-platform wagon technology for through freight trains using the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: Yes.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects United Kingdom approval of a standard low bogie system for running Berne gauge freight trains through the channel tunnel on to the United Kingdom railway network to be announced.

Mr. Freeman: Technical approval of freight wagons for operation in the United Kingdom is a matter for British Rail. Freight wagons for operation through the channel tunnel also require approval from Eurotunnel, the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority in consultation with Her Majesty's railway inspectorate, and other European railways. There is no proposal to run Berne gauge trains in the United Kingdom.

Cars (Carbon Dioxide Emissions)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to introduce stricter limits on carbon dioxide emissions for cars.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the strategy set out in "This Common Inheritance"—Cmnd. 1200.

Railway Safety

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail concerning their response mechanism to requests by fire services for trains to be stopped in emergency situations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for British Rail. I understand that BR is reviewing arrangements for emergency communication with fire services, and that BR aims to identify one railway control location for each geographical area of its operations.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what formal machinery exists for meetings between British Rail and representatives of local emergency services.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail liaises at all levels with the emergency services. Emergency procedures are regularly rehearsed both as theoretical and practical exercises to ensure that the emergency services are in a position to deal effectively with any incident that may occur.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pensions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the full provisions of the armed forces pension schemes are set out; and if he will summarise them.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The provisions of the armed forces pension scheme are set out in separate documents for each of the three services. For naval personnel, in Orders in Council; for Army personnel, in the Army Pensions Warrant 1977; for RAF personnel, in Queen's Regulations for the Royal Air Forces.

Overall, the provisions of the scheme are extensive and detailed. In broad terms the following are provided for:

—a lump sum and immediate long-service pension for a member who retires on completion of at least a minimum period of reckonable service of 16 years for commissioned officers, and 22 years for other ranks;

—a preserved pension and preserved lump sum, payable at age 60 or transferable to another scheme, for a member who completes at least two years' contracted-out service, but less than the minimum reckonable service required for the award of an immediate long-service pension;

—a lump sum and immediate tax-free pension for a member whose service is terminated prematurely on medical grounds which are attributable to service, and where the assessed degree of disability is 20 per cent. or more;

—a lump sum and immediate pension for a member whose service is terminated prematurely on medical grounds which are not attributable to service, or which are attributable but the assessed degree of disability is less than 20 per cent., provided that at least two years' reckonable service has been given;

—a pension for the eligible widow or widower of a member, which is for current service normally one half of that which would have been payable to the member but which, in the event of death being attributable to service, is at a special enhanced rate;

—a pension for each eligible child, up to age 17 or longer if full-time education continues.

In general the amount of lump sums, and rates of pension, are associated with rank held and length of service given. Awards made in cases where service is terminated on medical grounds which are attributable to service are not less than a guaranteed minimum level related to rank held and the assessed degree of disability. No minimum length of service is required in order for the member to become eligible for such an award nor, in the event of death attributable to service, for an award to any eligible widow or widower and child.

Long-service pensions are increased from age 55 to reflect movements in the retail prices index since the date of award. Other pensions are index-linked from the date of award.

The provisions apply equally to male and female members of the scheme.

Gulf War

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the contributions made in cash and in equipment by each of the allied countries involved in the Gulf war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following nations have committed naval, land or air forces, or medical units, to the coalition forces or are providing practical assistance to these forces:

Argentina
Australia
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Belgium
Canada
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Egypt
France
Greece
Hungary
Italy
Kuwait
Morocco
Netherlands
New Zealand
Niger
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Singapore
South Korea
Spain
Sweden
Syria
United Arab Emirates
United Kingdom
United States of America

A contingent of Afghan Mujaheddin is also serving in Saudi Arabia.

In addition to making practical contributions to the coalition force, a number of nations, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and South Korea, are also providing financial support. Japan, Germany and Hong Kong are making a financial contribution to the coalition and Turkey has agreed that the United States may use Turkish bases for operations into Iraq.

The following countries are providing financial or practical assistance, including medical support, to the United Kingdom.

Bahrain
Belgium

Canada
Denmark
Germany
Hong Kong
Japan
Kuwait
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Oman
Portugal
Romania
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
Spain
Sweden
United Arab Emirates

RAF Greenham Common

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the redeployment of units of the United States air force in the United Kingdom will have any bearing on the future of RAF Greenham Common as one of their standby bases.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The redeployment of United States dual capable aircraft in the United Kingdom, announced by my right hon. Friend on 5 February, will not have any effect on the future of RAF Greenham Common as a United States standby base.

Trident

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I am pleased to announce that for the fifth year running there has been, in real terms, a reduction in the estimated cost of the Trident programme. The revised estimate now stands at £9,863 million, based on the exchange rate used for the long-term costing of the defence programme, which this year is £1 = $1·56.

Although this estimate represents a cash increase of £483 million compared to that announced last year, after allowing for the effects of inflation and exchange rate variations, there has been a real reduction of £126 million, and a real reduction of £1,838 million over the original 1982 Trident II estimate. This is additional to the savings resulting from the decision to have United Kingdom missiles processed in the United States facility at King's bay, Georgia.

The proportion of the programme to be undertaken in the United Kingdom has increased from 69 to 71 per cent.

The Select Committee on Defence previously asked that when announcing the annual revised estimate, I should report on the state of the project as a whole. I am pleased to say that the Trident programme remains on schedule to enter service in the mid-1990s. There has been no slippage in the in-service data since the decision to purchase Trident II was announced in March 1982. I am, as in previous years, sending to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence and the Public Accounts Committee a more detailed report covering the points on which the Select Committee on Defence sought advice. I am also placing a copy of this report in the Library of the House.

ENERGY

Gas Escapes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his written answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *423*, whether British Gas has any enforceable obligation to make safe any gas escape free of charge or to provide safety checks free of charge where the customer is not elderly or disabled and living alone.

Mr. Moynihan: The obligation to make gas escapes safe free of charge is enforceable as part of British Gas's authorisation. However, there is no obligation on British Gas to offer safety checks free of charge for customers who are neither elderly nor disabled.

Nuclear Plants

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many nuclear plants are located near the west coast of Great Britain.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are 12 operating civil nuclear plants located near the west coast of Great Britain. In addition, two Magnox stations, at Berkeley and Hunterston, are in the process of being decommissioned.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will take steps to ensure that people who applied for shares in the electricity distribution companies are refunded immediately with the funds they submitted for shares with which they were not allocated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The receiving banks sent refunds before Christmas to the vast majority of the applicants to whom they were due. They deployed substantial resources throughout January to resolve the majority of the relatively small number of outstanding cases, and are dealing with the few that remain as a matter of priority.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the sum of money submitted for shares in the electricity distribution companies; who has had the use of the money submitted for shares which were not allocated; and what arrangements are being made to pay interest to the owners of the money who have not yet had it returned.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: About £7 billion was submitted in respect of the public offer. Surplus application money was returned to applicants as rapidly as possible: the interest earned on this money in the interim will accrue to the taxpayer. The terms and conditions of the sale made it clear that no interest on such funds would be payable to applicants.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the Director General of OFFER and the chairmen of the regional electricity companies regarding the security of supply of electricity for space-heating and cooking to the elderly, the infirm and the very young during the current cold snap.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The code of practice operated by the regional electricity companies makes it clear that no

consumer in genuine difficulty with their payments will be disconnected, provided that they contact their regional electricity company and agree and keep to a payment arrangement. In addition, the Prime Minister announced on 7 February that cold weather payments to vulnerable groups in receipt of income support had been increased to £6 from 1 February and that the whole of the United Kingdom would qualify for the period from 1 to 7 February.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with *(a)* the chairmen of the regional electricity companies and *(b)* the Director General of Electricity regulation regarding the level of cut-offs in domestic electricity supply during the present cold snap.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given him today. The latest available 12-monthly figures show disconnections for non-payment of bills standing at their lowest level since records began in 1976.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *507*, for what reasons he decided not to maintain figures concerning the proportion of eligible homes in England and Wales with thermostats installed on 50 per cent. or more radiator valves.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The energy efficiency industry provides the Energy Efficiency Office in my Department with information on the sales of various types of insulation and heating products, including thermostatic radiator valves, thus enabling the Energy Efficiency Office to monitor trends in the industry. However, the information provided does not enable the incidence of installation of thermostatic radiator valves in domestic premises to be monitored, and my Department does not require such information in the normal conduct of its business.

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to publish forecasts as to when he anticipates different energy efficiency measures will achieve 50 per cent. of the eligible market.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no plans to publish such forecasts. Although the Government will continue to promote and encourage greater energy efficiency in the home, the take-up of individual measures by householders will depend on numerous factors, which will vary from product to product. The Energy Efficiency Office in my Department seeks to assess the success of its programmes and activities by evaluations, market research surveys, examination of trade sales figures and so on, but does not attempt to forecast future levels of market penetration.

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on the proportion of lighting which has been converted to energy-efficient lighting at *(a)* the Palace of Westminster, *(b)* Government buildings, *(c)* establishments owned or occupied in each Government Department and *(d)* local authorities.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As part of the Government's drive to improve energy efficiency in Government buildings, my Energy Efficiency Office gives advice, and encourages Departments to adopt cost-effective energy efficiency measures including lighting. However each Department has responsibility for the energy management of its own estate, and the information requested is not held centrally.

Electricity Industry Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he, or officials of his Department, have been invited to participate in the conference on the electricity industry post privatisation, to be held in London on 15 April.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turkey

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will protest to the Turkish Government about the recent confiscation of the magazine *Towards 2000* and the summonsing to military court of Mahmut Dikerdem.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have no plans to raise these cases with the Turkish authorities. But we have repeatedly urged the Turkish authorities, at ministerial level, to respect their obligations under international human rights conventions.

Research and Development

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many research and development agreements and contracts have been funded by departments in the Foreign Office, excluding ODA, at universities and polytechnics; how many universities and polytechnics have received those research and development contracts and agreements; what is their total value in each of the last five years; and if he will list them.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There have been only two research contracts or agreements funded by the FCO at universities or polytechnics in the last five years. They were:

(i) Study by London University (School of Slavonic and East European Studies) on "The Inter-War Party and Political System in the present non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries and its relevance today" (1990).

(ii) Study by London University (School of Oriental and African Studies on "Muslim militancy in sub-Saharan Africa") (1990).

The combined cost was £13,245·00.

Aramco Employees, Dhahran

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his answer, *Official Report*, 4 February, column *1*, whether he will instruct the British ambassador to Saudi Arabia to seek an assurance from the president of Aramco that Aramco will not penalise those British nationals under contract to the company who do not attend work during air raid warning periods.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Employees of Aramco are under a contractual agreement to the company. We understand that a few, employed on essential services, are required to work through air raid warning periods. Such persons may,

in the circumstances, wish to terminate their contracts. As I informed the hon. Member on 4 February at column *1*, the British ambassador to Saudi Arabia has been assured by the president of Aramco that the company would not penalise those who sought to leave because of the war, and that accrued benefits would not be forfeited.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom delegation to the 1990 nuclear non-proliferation fourth review conference in Geneva supported paragraphs 1 to 8 of section VIII, concerning attacks on nuclear facilities contained in the addendum to document NPT/CONF.IV/MCIII/L.1/ADD.2.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom did not take a position on the language to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Iraq

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases of breach or suspected breach of sanctions in regard to trade with Iraq have now ben received by the United Nations or brought to the knowledge of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We follow up reported sanctions breaches both bilaterally and at the UN: these are treated confidentially and no figures on the numbers of suspected or actual cases of sanctions breaches are publicly available. Any cases of sanctions breaches by United Kingdom nationals and companies are a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Lebanon

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take action through the United Nations to require Israel to allow Lebanese Government forces to take up their positions in south Lebanon.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We joined in the unanimous vote of the Security Council on 30 January to review the UNIFIL mandate and to reiterate support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognised boundaries.

East Timor

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the number of civilians in East Timor who have been killed or died from starvation since the invasion by Indonesia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Reliable statistics are unavailable. We believe that the figure may be in the region of 100,000 deaths.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he or officials of his Department has had any contact with the Falantic Liberation Army in East Timor since the invasion by Indonesia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No.

EC Food Aid

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs from which EC budget the recently agreed 40 million ecu of EC food aid for Romania and Bulgaria is to be paid; and from which Department's budget are Britain's contributions paid to that budget.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The European Council on 10 December 1990 agreed 100 mecu of emergency food aid for Romania and Bulgaria; 30 mecu will come from savings in the 1990 agriculture budget. Following consideration by the 21 December Council, discussion continues on the source of the remaining 70 mecu. The United Kingdom share of this 100 mecu will form part of our contribution to Community own resources in line with all other EC budget expenditure.

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which member states of the allied military force in the Gulf war remain subject to special licensing procedures for military sensitive exports from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: All exports of military equipment are subject to stringent licensing control, whatever their destination.

Syria

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions when he or his predecessors have met the Syrian Foreign Minister since 1979; and if he will make a statement on the most recent meeting.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, met the Syrian Foreign Minister in London in March 1979. As Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the Syrian Foreign Minister in Damascus in October 1979 and in London in September 1981 and July 1982. My noble Friend the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Lord Pym, met the Syrian Foreign Minister in London in September 1982 and in Damascus in October 1982. My right hon. and learned Friend for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, had meetings with the Syrian Foreign Minister in New York in September 1983, in Damascus in January 1984, again in New York in September 1984 and lastly in London in March 1986.

The meeting that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had with Mr. Shara' on 6 February provided the first opportunity since the resumption of diplomatic relations with Syria to discuss regional and bilateral matters at ministerial level. It was timely and valuable.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Alcoholic Beverages

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will conduct an investigation and review of the Food Labelling Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 768) to ensure that they do not permit the adulteration of alcoholic beverages as indicated in a recent report from the trading standards department of Cleveland county council, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Maclean: I have not yet studied the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers. When I have done so, I will send him a detailed reply.

Consultative Paper

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the consultative paper announced on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *437*, is ready for issue; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Copies of the consultative paper inviting comments on the proposals of myself and the Secretary of State for Wales for reform of the law on agricultural tenancies in England and Wales have been placed in the Library of the House today and made available to interested parties.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Officers

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will use his powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act to have complaints in respect of the use of racially discriminating language or behaviour by police officers referred automatically to the Police Complaints Authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. My right hon. Friend does not believe that it would be appropriate for him to do so.

Police Complaints

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints concerning the use of racially discriminating language or behaviour by police officers were made to the Police Complaints Authority in each of the last five years; and how many were upheld.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) on 29 November 1990, at column *452*, which gives the available information about such complaints. Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Political Asylum

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were given political asylum in the United Kingdom in 1990; and what were the comparable figures for each European Community nation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Full information on grants of asylum in the United Kingdom in 1990 is not yet available. To date, about 1,600 such grants, including associated dependants, are recorded, but this understates because of delays in recording. Information on grants of asylum in other EC countries in 1990 is not yet available.

Ms. Linda Humphries

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how much longer Linda Humphries is to be held at Risley prior to being sent to Ashworth hospital.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that Miss Humphries will be admitted to Ashworth hospital very shortly, as soon as a bed is available.

Remand Centres (Suicides)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of suicides in remand centres, and the centres concerned, for each year since 1985.

Mrs. Rumbold: The numbers of self-inflicted deaths since 1988 by prisoners at establishments whose main role is that of a remand centre have been as follows:

Establishment	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*Total*
Ashford	—	1	1	—	—	—	2
Hindley[1]	—	—	—	—	1	3	4
Risley	1	1	3	4	2	—	11
Total	1	2	4	4	3	3	17

[1] Became a remand centre in spring 1989.

There have been no self-inflicted deaths since 1985 at the following remand centres: Brockhill, Feltham, Glen Parva, Latchmere House, Low Newton, Pucklechurch.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is given to prison officers and prison medical staff in dealing with remand prisoners who are *(a)* mentally disturbed, *(b)* drug addicts and *(c)* have AIDS.

Mrs. Rumbold: Responsibility for the health care of prisoners in any prison service establishment rests with the managing medical officer—MMO—of the establishment. The MMO is also responsible for assessing the further training needs of his or her health care colleagues and ensuring that, to the extent that resources permit, they are met either by making local arrangements for training—for example, by links with local NHS hospitals and clinics—by taking advantage of the wide range of external courses that are available to members of the medical and nursing professions or by securing places on courses organised centrally by the directorate of prison medical services.

Recent courses organised centrally have included 24-week induction courses for hospital officers of which about six weeks are devoted to psychiatric care, one day to

AIDS and a half day to drug addiction and dependency; a two-day course and a series of one-day seminars for medical officers on clinical aspects of AIDS; a 10-day course for hospital officers with an emphasis on the nursing care of AIDS patients; and a two-day seminar on drug misuse for medical officers and other staff from establishments for women.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sudan

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the £4 million of famine relief for Sudan, announced on 5 February, will be paid for from the 1991-92 budget.

Mrs. Chalker: The full cost—estimated at £4 million—of the additional 20,000 tonnes of food aid for famine relief in Sudan, which I announced on 5 February, will be met from the 1991-92 aid budget. My officials are already discussing the detailed uses for this pledge with a number of non-governmental organisations. I hope to agree allocations shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Prudential Corporation plc

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take any action against Prudential Corporation plc for its failure to publish the salaries of directors in its latest accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Acts.

Mr. Redwood: The information to which the hon. Member refers is disclosed at page 41 of the company's report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 1989.

PRIME MINISTER

United Kingdom 2000

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the total funding to date of the United Kingdom 200 initiative set up by his predecessor under the chairmanship of Mr. Richard Branson; which voluntary organisations have been involved; what have been the achievements of the initiative; whether he has any further proposals to develop this initiative; and whether he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Total Government funding to March 1991 will be £9·434 million. The partner voluntary organisations in England are the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, the Civic Trust, Community Service Volunteers, Groundwork, Friends of the Earth and the Royal Society for Nature Conservation. In Wales the organisations involved are the same apart from the Civic Trust, and in addition the Keep Wales Tidy Campaign. In Scotland, the organisations are the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Conservation Projects, Community Service Volunteers and Keep Scotland Beautiful.

The main achievements have been high-quality, practical environmental improvement projects, training and work experience together with the creation of new environmental enterprises. This work has been carried out in partnership with the public and private sectors. In 1989-90 there were 717 projects which generated 7,819 training places and 54,218 volunteers and which attracted £2·423 million support from the private sector.

In England United Kingdom 2000 phase 2 began on 31 March 1991 and, subject to performance, the voluntary organisations will continue to receive grant until March 1993. United Kingdom 2000 (Scotland) will be launched as a company limited by guarantee in April 1991. The initiative in Wales has recently been fully reviewed; the next steps are now under consideration.

United Nations

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make it his policy to put forward proposals to amend the United Nations charter to provide for periodic elections of all members of the United Nations Security Council;

(2) if he will make it his policy to put forward proposals to amend the United Nations charter to provide that United Nations Security Council members should have veto powers;

(3) if he will make it his policy to put forward proposals to amend the United Nations charter to provide that in the event of war waged in the name of the United Nations basic decisions are taken by all member countries of the United Nations with an ad hoc executive committee to supervise the conduct of hostilities by the armed forces acting for the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: No. The Government do not believe that reform of the United Nations charter is either necessary or desirable.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects the United Nations Security Council to meet to discuss the conduct of the war in the Persian Gulf.

The Prime Minister: The United Nations Security Council has met frequently since the outbreak of hostilities in the Gulf on 2 August, most recently in informal consultations on 8 February.

Lanarkshire

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister what specific plans he has to improve investment in Lanarkshire.

The Prime Minister: The Lanarkshire working group, which met last month, will identify the main constraints to revitalising the Lanarkshire economy and recommend measures to resolve those problems. Investment in Lanarkshire from the private and public sector, is among the working group's concerns. The working group expects to report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland around the end of April.

Pensioners

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Prime Minister what is the estimated additional cost incurred weekly by pensioners in Northern Ireland for heating, lighting and travel when expenditure is compared with that of pensioners in a comparable region in Great Britain.

The Prime Minister: Information on the expenditure of pensioner households[1] on heating, lighting and travel is

available at household level from the family expenditure survey. Northern Ireland compares with Wales in terms of average normal weekly disposable income for all households, including pensioner households. The table providese information from the amalgamated results of the 1988-89 family expenditure survey for pensioner households.

Average Weekly Household Expenditure on Selected Items:

	Northern Ireland	*Wales*	*Additional expenditure in Northern Ireland*
	£	£	£
Total motoring and fares	5·20	4·29	0·91
Fuel, light and power	13·11	8·55	4·56

[1] A pensioner household is defined as one in which at least three quarters of the total income of the household is derived from national insurance retirement and similar pensions.

1851 Exhibition

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister when the holder of his office last attended a meeting of the royal commissioners for the exhibition of 1851.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of such a meeting.

Probation Officers, Liverpool

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the probation officer based at Liverpool about salaries; and what reply he has sent.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has received representations from seven probation officers from Merseyside about probation officers' salaries. They either have received or will receive official replies.

Correspondence

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Prime Minister whether the policy of the Government with regard to correspondence between hon. Members and officials remains as set out in the letter from the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, of 18 May 1989.

The Prime Minister: It is for Ministers in each Department to decide how correspondence will be handled. Following the recent scrutiny of ministerial correspondence, Departments are considering how to assist Members of Parliament to direct their inquiries to the point which is best able to give them a fast, informed and helpful reply.

The Government reply to the eighth report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee—Cmnd 1263—states that Ministers will normally ask the chief executive of an agency to reply to letters that concern day-to-day operational matters delegated to the agency.

East Timor

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the Timor Gap agreement between Indonesia and Australia; and whether this agreement was discussed during his telephone conversation with Prime Minister Hawke of Australia on 5 February.

The Prime Minister: The Timor Gap agreement is a matter between Indonesia and Australia, who recognised East Timor's incorporation into Indonesia in 1979. The agreement in no way affects our own stance on recognition. I have not discussed the agreement with Prime Minister Hawke.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I also called on Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, and presented her with a gift from the Cabinet to mark her 90th year. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken by allied bombing sorties over Iraq to avoid disruption of the ecological balance of the marshes in the River Euphrates delta and to the habitat of the striped hyenas, jackals and wolves of the western desert of Iraq and northern Saudi Arabia.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* Allied aircrews have instructions to attack only military targets which could pose a threat to allied forces or facilities supporting Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. The missions are carefully planned to minimise the risk of damage to other areas.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Worthing on 4 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *17*, by what process British nuclear test veterans may seek to establish the Crown's legal liability for compensation for the effects of radiation while serving in Her Majesty's forces.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* The process to establish the Crown's legal liability in this matter is the need, in common law, to show that participants in the test programme had been exposed to radiation due to Ministry of Defence negligence and that such exposure caused them harm. The Government commissioned a study by the National Radiological Protection Board into this and the report published in 1988 did not establish a causal link between participation and an increased incidence of cancer. A further study by the NRPB to validate the findings of the previous study has been commissioned and the report is due to be published in 1992.

Elderly People

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will convene a working group comprised of representatives of the Departments of Health, Social Security and the Environment and of the public, private and voluntary

sector providers, funders and user representatives to undertake an investigation into problems and issues involved in funding care for the elderly.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* There are regular opportunities for interdepartmental consultation on the care needs of elderly people. Provider and user interests are fully reflected in this process. We believe that the creation of a formal working group of the kind suggested would add little to the existing effective collaboration machinery, and might in fact diminish its effectiveness.

Toxteth Riots

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now place in the Library *(a)* the report of the Secretary of State for the Environment about the Toxteth riots, entitled "It Took a Riot", *(b)* the letter of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) in response to that report and *(c)* the report of the former Central Policy Review Staff on problems of the inner cities; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* No.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Child Care Costs

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in Treasury income during the 1991-92 financial year resulting from the introduction of tax allowance for child care costs equivalent to *(a)* £50 a week and *(b)* £500 a year, assuming one tax relief per family set against the taxable income of the mother, giving separate figures for (i) all families with children under the age of 16 years and (ii) families with at least one child under the age of five years.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of the cost of extra allowances to working married mothers and lone parents in 1991-92 are given in the table. They are based on projections from the 1988 and 1989 family expenditure surveys and are therefore provisional.

Cost (£ billion)

	Allowance of	
	(a) £50 per week	*(b) £500 per year*
Allowance to those with		
(i) children under 16	1·3	0·3
(ii) children under 5	0·4	0·1

Public Expenditure

Mr. Ridley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in public spending, in real terms, between 1979 and 1990, expressed as a percentage in *(a)* the national health service, *(b)* the social security programme, *(c)* local authority education spending, *(d)* higher and further education expenditure, *(e)* subsidies to councils and housing, *(f)* associations in pursuit of providing cheap housing for the less well-off, *(g)* housing benefit, *(h)* rate rebates and community charge rebates and *(i)* the arts; and if he will also give the real-terms increase in the gross national product over the same period.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information is not readily available in exactly the form requested. Information is, however, available on general Government expenditure by function over this period and is given in tables 2.2—cash figures—and 2.3—real terms figures—of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement"—Cm 1520. The percentage changes between 1979-80 and 1990-91 in the real-term figures for the functions covering items listed in the question are as follows:

	Per cent.
Health	+37
Social Security	+35
Education and Science	+16
Housing	−54
Arts and libraries	+38

Information on individual components within each function could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

A forecast of the gross national product for 1990-91 is not readily available to allow the corresponding percentage change to be calculated. Based on the autumn statement forecast for 1990-91, gross domestic product is estimated to have risen by about 25 per cent. in real terms over the period 1979-80 to 1990-91.

Inflation

Mr. Lester: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's policy regarding the extent to which *(a)* quangos and *(b)* voluntary organisations which receive financial support are compensated for inflation.

Mr. Mellor: Funding of non-departmental public bodies and voluntary organisations is a matter for the relevant sponsoring Department. There is no automatic compensation for inflation.

Severely Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the possibility of granting income tax relief to severely disabled people who have to pay for nursing attendant care in order that they may continue to work and to live as independently as possible; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have received one such representation, but, at this time of year, the right hon. Gentleman will not expect me to comment further.

Efficient Cars

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to introduce fiscal initiatives to encourage motor manufacturers to produce more efficient cars.

Mr. Maude: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Customs and Excise Management Act

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in the *Official Report* all successful prosecutions made under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information is published in the annual report of the Commissioners of Customs and Excise, a copy of which is in the Library.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the progress of personal equity plans.

Mr. Maude: I am pleased to say that PEPs continue to be very successful. In the 15 months to March 1990 a total of 580,000 plans were taken out, with initial investment of £1,600 million. The provisional figures for the first two quarters of 1990-91 show that a high level of enthusiasm for PEPs continues, with a further 200,000 plans taken out and £600 million invested. The average amount invested remains approximately £3,000.

The total number of plans taken out since PEPs started is now nearly 1·2 million. The total subscribed—ignoring investment growth—is almost £3 billion.

The cost of the income tax relief is estimated at £20 million for 1989-90 and £45 million for 1990-91.

WALES

Planning Officers

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will bring forward legislative proposals to prevent local authority planning officers leaving their council employment and setting up private planning consultancies operating in their original areas of jurisdiction.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No.

Students

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what number and what percentage of full-time students over the age of 18 years in Wales are studying in *(a)* further education and tertiary colleges and *(b)* maintained 11 to 18 years schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number and percentage of full-time students aged over 18 years of age for 1989-90 are as follows:

	Number	*Per cent.*
Further education and tertiary colleges[1]		
Aged 19	1,104	28
Aged 20 and over[2]	2,759	70
Maintained secondary schools[3]		
11-18	39	1
Other[4]	21	1
Total students	3,923	100

[1] Full-time and sandwich students on further education courses at higher and further education tertiary colleges. At 31 August 1989.
[2] Includes age not known.
[3] Aged 19 at 31 August 1989.
[4] 6th form colleges in Clwyd and South Glamorgan and senior comprehensive school (14-18) in Gwent.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what numbers and what percentage of full-time students in further education colleges in each county of Wales are studying *(a)* A and AS level, *(b)* BTEC, first and national diploma and *(c)* GCSE.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information for 1989-90 is as follows:

	A and A/S levels		*BTEC first and national diploma*		*GCSE*	
	Number	*per cent.*	*Number*	*per cent.*	*Number*	*per cent.*
Clwyd	451	13	1,528	45	251	7
Dyfed	50	2	1,337	51	40	2
Gwent	112	8	277	20	79	6
Gwynedd	69	4	782	48	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	75	2	1,281	38	53	2
Powys	13	2	420	52	40	5
South Glamorgan	50	3	605	39	36	2
West Glamorgan	—	—	89	30	—	—
WALES	820	5	6,319	42	499	3

Numbers relate to full-time and sandwich students following the required courses at higher and further education colleges, excluding tertiary colleges. They are shown as a percentage of the full-time and sandwich students on further education courses.

Languages

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment has been made of the effect of the compulsory teaching of Welsh at secondary level on the teaching of modern languages in those schools in non-native Welsh-speaking areas which have traditionally offered more than one modern language to GCSE level.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It is too early to gauge the effect of the introduction of Welsh in those schools in non-native speaking areas but I refer the hon. Gentleman to my right hon. Friend's announcement on 22 January about the structure of key stage 4 in the national curriculum in Wales. All pupils will be required to study both Welsh and a modern foreign language. The proposed structure will provide greater flexibility for parents and pupils to be offered a full choice of subjects including a second modern language.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide the detailed calculation of the transitional relief level for poll tax payers in the community of *(a)* Queensferry, *(b)* Shotton, *(c)* Connah's Quay, *(d)* Howarden, *(e)* Broughton and Bretton, *(f)* Higher Kinnerton and *(g)* Penyffordd.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 4 February at columns *22-24* for the method of calculation.

The figures for the communities requested are given in the following table:

Relief: 1990-91

Local authority and community council	*(1) Domestic rateable value* £	*(2) Relevant population*[1] *Number*	*(3) Domestic poundage* p	*(4) Notional average domestic rates per adult* £	*(5) Forecast community charge* £	*(6) Difference between community charge and rates* £	*(7) Amount above £18 threshold* £
Alyn and Deeside							
Queensferry	99,749	1,536	270·8	176	184	8	−10
Shotton	341,760	4,817	270·8	192	184	−8	−26
Connah's Quay	845,875	10,717	270·8	214	184	−30	−48
Hawarden	777,984	9,157	270·8	230	184	−46	−64
Broughton and Bretton	348,856	4,123	270·8	229	184	−45	−63
Higher Kinnerton	104,213	1,123	270·8	251	184	−67	−85
Penyffordd	216,534	2,564	270·8	229	184	−45	−63

[1] As specified in Appendix 2 of the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report.

Relief: 1991-92

Local authority and community council	*(1) Domestic rateable value* £	*(2) Relevant population*[1] *Number*	*(3) Domestic poundage* p	*(4) Notional average domestic rates per adult* £	*(5) 1990-91 community charge* £	*(6) Difference between community charge and rates* £	*(7) Amount above £37 threshold* £
Alyn and Deeside							
Queensferry	99,749	1,536	270·8	176	262	86	49
Shotton	341,760	4,817	270·8	192	262	70	33
Connah's Quay	845,875	10,717	270·8	214	262	48	11
Hawarden	777,984	9,157	270·8	230	262	32	−5
Broughton and Bretton	348,856	4,123	270·8	229	262	33	−4
Higher Kinnerton	104,213	1,123	270·8	251	262	11	−26
Penyffordd	216,534	2,564	270·8	229	262	33	−4

[1] As specified in Appendix 2 of the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report.

Blood Products

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people with haemophilia in Wales who require factor VIII infusions are being treated with high purity monoclonal products; how many are being treated with the intermediate purity concentrates; and if he will break the figures down according to *(a)* product manufacturer, *(b)* the number of units of each product prescribed in the latest year for which data is available and *(c)* for each health authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally.

Lime Subsidy

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to reintroduce the lime subsidy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no plans to extend grant aid for routine applications of lime. Farmers with improvement plans under the Farm and Conservation Grant Regulations can obtain grant assistance towards the cost of liming land where this is part of a programme of reseeding and regeneration. In the less-favoured areas, lime treatment alone is eligible for grant where it can be demonstrated to be genuine restoration and not routine treatment.

Caravan Sites

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many caravan sites there are in *(a)* Ceredigion and *(b)* Dyfed; what the corresponding figures were for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Small Businesses

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps are being taken in Wales by his Department to help small businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department continues to attach a high priority to the promotion of enterprise and to helping small businesses. General economic policies at a national level, national enterprise support policies and initiatives that are unique to Wales such as the Enterprise Wales scheme are all helping to make Wales a place where small businesses can flourish. In Wales the latest annual figures —most recently published in July 1990—show that by the end of 1989 the total number of businesses registered for VAT was nearly 85,200, an increase of 21 per cent. on the stock of businesses at the end of 1979.

Deeside Community Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes the commissioning of the Deeside community hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The time scale for commissioning the Deeside community hospital is a matter for the Clwyd health authority.

Mancot Community Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his future plans for Mancot community hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Plans for Mancot community hospital are a matter for Clwyd district health authority at this time.

Hospitals, Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to visit *(a)* Dobshill hospital, Clwyd, *(b)* Meadowsleigh hospital, Clwyd, and *(a)* Broughton hospital, Clwyd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit these hospitals at present.

Waste Imports

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what quantities per nation annually European toxic waste has been imported by Wales for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on the importation of waste by country of origin into the United Kingdom is available only for the period since the introduction of the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations in October 1988. The information available in respect of

imports of waste for disposal in Wales from European Community states for the years to 31 March 1989 and 1990 is shown in the table.

Imports of Hazardous Waste into Wales for the Continent of Europe

Country of Origin	Quantity (Tonnes) 1988-89	1989-90
Belgium	3,265	1,274
France	—	16
Federal Republic of Germany	—	331
Greece	—	5
Republic of Ireland	—	148
Italy	73	974
Luxembourg	—	17
Netherlands	351	281
Portugal	—	73
Spain	—	218

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what quantity of waste, in the last year for which figures are available, was imported for direct landfill within Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No imports of hazardous waste for disposal at Welsh landfill sites have been notified under the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of waste incinerated within Wales is imported; and what are the projected levels of such importation for the next decade.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Figures on waste incineration are not maintained centrally and no future projections are available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

District Councils

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount of general grant factor given to each Northern Ireland district council in 1980-81 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Needham: The information is set out in the table.

Total amount of general grant paid to each district council from 1980-81 to 1988-89

Council	1980-81 (£)	1981-82 (£)	1982-83 (£)	1983-84 (£)	1984-85 (£)	1985-86 (£)	1986-87 (£)	1987-88 (£)	1988-89 (£)
Antrim	203,022	328,676	273,676	330,827	259,285	312,498	370,276	297,415	230,107
Ards	346,468	593,983	702,750	877,683	821,992	853,823	1,145,922	1,144,002	1,109,965
Armagh	502,001	671,488	692,015	854,148	774,515	806,218	874,313	934,594	917,120
Ballymena	299,894	375,831	393,015	408,572	429,719	416,316	515,209	441,014	468,248
Ballymoney	204,458	311,116	361,020	425,117	422,414	433,467	457,971	600,071	553,888
Banbridge	311,737	383,449	395,849	477,166	490,608	505,922	529,522	605,433	586,867
Belfast	2,010,941	2,285,195	2,987,789	3,999,843	4,365,614	4,692,549	5,122,136	5,368,404	5,680,258
Carrickfergus	351,657	433,369	523,866	508,389	447,617	423,650	430,674	462,328	449,508
Castlereagh	418,909	422,403	467,568	545,002	470,966	435,300	526,291	426,557	430,021
Coleraine	197,769	227,528	245,284	344,277	349,431	370,204	342,722	288,401	311,666
Cookstown	286,874	330,280	376,234	468,069	444,731	470,701	479,230	517,465	477,515
Craigavon	639,863	727,980	877,940	1,169,184	1,253,782	1,258,565	1,256,531	1,503,284	1,505,757
Derry	988,283	1,389,176	1,649,291	2,005,417	2,155,433	2,150,279	2,411,072	2,517,295	2,698,647
Down	458,227	677,867	750,882	916,544	901,658	1,059,929	1,235,652	1,427,921	1,437,359
Dungannon	511,942	606,880	735,385	886,125	908,574	945,193	887,350	971,853	942,600
Fermanagh	695,689	807,546	882,082	1,015,839	1,029,604	1,054,522	1,144,780	1,193,343	1,116,206
Larne	169,423	248,236	320,358	346,137	350,127	383,348	395,700	372,040	390,630
Limavady	239,746	305,037	332,150	372,369	382,499	428,037	486,044	522,866	607,730
Lisburn	361,035	511,401	674,101	889,998	915,718	798,696	1,089,944	1,015,680	1,117,620
Magherafelt	307,121	394,661	452,749	558,461	568,099	615,274	623,256	687,739	711,912
Moyle	183,634	229,752	265,262	326,380	386,676	372,579	447,260	463,143	457,943
Newry and Mourne	1,004,081	1,232,093	1,518,586	1,890,419	2,259,691	2,387,487	2,598,258	2,632,989	2,670,374
Newtownabbey	518,411	538,930	608,465	892,923	951,454	1,027,691	1,050,207	1,053,659	986,500
North Down	85,624	187,687	277,955	378,878	371,700	347,092	655,536	581,305	591,281
Omagh	440,336	629,884	792,264	958,572	1,064,991	1,109,986	1,026,753	1,114,700	1,106,807
Strabane	612,662	667,876	846,538	890,887	1,049,679	1,163,216	1,097,377	1,243,202	1,204,510

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a table showing the district rate for each district council in ascending order for the year 1980-81 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Needham: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the 1990-91 estimated gross expenditure for each district council in Northern Ireland; and what is the estimated population of each district.

Mr. Needham: The information is set out in the table.

1990-91 Estimated Gross Expenditure and Estimated Civilian Population

Council	1990-91 Estimated Gross Expenditure for each DC £	Population as at 30 June 1988
Antrim	3,904,746	45,700
Ards	7,131,700	64,000
Armagh	3,536,450	49,000
Ballymena	4,844,774	56,700
Ballymoney	2,088,880	23,900
Banbridge	2,631,476	31,900
Belfast	52,833,755	298,400
Carrickfergus	3,792,648	30,000
Castlereagh	5,379,512	58,000
Coleraine	5,178,013	48,100
Cookstown	2,218,294	27,600

Council	1990-91 Estimated Gross Expenditure for each DC £	Population as at 30 June 1988
Craigavon	8,548,553	77,200
Derry	12,913,960	97,700
Down	5,702,974	56,100
Dungannon	3,347,209	43,700
Fermanagh	4,608,528	49,300
Larne	2,714,676	29,000
Limavady	2,276,544	29,300
Lisburn	7,888,184	93,400
Magherafelt	2,402,956	33,100
Moyle	1,193,930	15,200
Newry and Mourne	7,832,050	87,100
Newtownabbey	7,839,495	72,800
North Down	7,587,657	70,300
Omagh	5,094,611	44,200
Strabane	3,435,348	35,200

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the increase in district rate for each district council in Northern Ireland since 1980-81 in both pence and percentage terms.

Mr. Needham: The information is set out in the table.

Council	1980-81 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	6·50	28·80
Ards	12·00	50·00
Armagh	5·34	25·80
Ballymena	4·00	17·30
Ballymoney	6·00	30·80
Banbridge	4·00	16·70
Belfast	9·40	30·60
Carrickfergus	8·50	29·30
Castlereagh	6·50	30·20
Coleraine	7·50	27·80
Cookstown	9·00	21·60
Craigavon	5·00	15·60
Derry	10·26	35·10
Down	7·00	30·40
Dungannon	5·00	23·20
Fermanagh	6·00	25·50
Larne	5·00	16·70
Limavady	4·50	22·50
Lisburn	4·86	20·90
Magherafelt	3·00	18·75
Moyle	7·00	28·00
Newry and Mourne	4·50	20·00
Newtownabbey	6·00	18·75
North Down	8·00	33·30
Omagh	4·50	23·70
Strabane	5·00	19·20

Council	1981-82 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	3·5	12·1
Ards	6·0	16·7
Armagh	2·0	7·7
Ballymena	3·0	11·1
Ballymoney	9·0	35·3
Banbridge	3·0	10·7
Belfast	6·4	16·0
Carrickfergus	9·0	24·0
Castlereagh	3·0	10·7
Coleraine	4·0	11·6
Cookstown	2·5	11·1
Craigavon	5·5	14·9
Derry	5·1	12·9
Down	7·0	23·3
Dungannon	3·5	13·2
Fermanagh	3·5	11·9
Larne	4·0	11·4
Limavady	3·0	12·2
Lisburn	7·53	26·8
Magherafelt	2·75	14·5
Moyle	14·0	43·8
Newry and Mourne	3·5	13·0
Newtownabbey	3·0	7·9
North Down	6·5	20·3
Omagh	5·5	23·4
Strabane	3·0	9·7

Council	1982-83 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	7·0	21·5
Ards	7·0	16·7
Armagh	2·5	8·9
Ballymena	2·5	8·3
Ballymoney	4·0	11·6
Banbridge	2·2	7·1
Belfast	8·4	18·1
Carrickfergus	4·0	8·6
Castlereagh	3·0	9·7
Coleraine	2·25	5·8
Cookstown	2·5	10·0
Craigavon	4·25	10·0
Derry	4·7	10·5
Down	6·0	16·2
Dungannon	2·0	6·7
Fermanagh	2·75	8·3
Larne	3·0	7·7
Limavady	3·0	10·9
Lisburn	4·4	12·4
Magherafelt	3·0	13·8
Moyle	4·0	8·7
Newry and Mourne	8·5	27·9
Newtownabbey	2·0	4·9
North Down	4·5	11·7
Omagh	5·0	17·2
Strabane	2·55	7·5

Council	1983-84 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	—	0·00
Ards	1·00	2·00
Armagh	1·50	4·90
Ballymena	1·50	4·60
Ballymoney	1·50	3·90
Banbridge	2·29	6·90
Belfast	5·70	10·40
Carrickfergus	1·25	2·50
Castlereagh	1·00	−2·90
Coleraine	2·00	4·90
Cookstown	3·75	13·60
Craigavon	3·72	8·00
Derry	4·40	8·90
Down	2·00	4·70
Dungannon	2·00	6·30
Fermanagh	2·25	6·30
Larne	1·50	3·60
Limavady	1·00	3·30
Lisburn	3·01	7·50
Magherafelt	4·25	17·20
Moyle	1·90	3·80
Newry and Mourne	4·00	10·30
Newtownabbey	2·00	4·70
North Down	2·50	5·80

Council	1983-84 Actual p	per cent.
Omagh	5·00	14·70
Strabane	4·95	13·50

Council	1984-85 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	1·00	2·05
Ards	—	0·00
Armagh	1·50	4·07
Ballymena	1·50	4·04
Ballymoney	1·00	2·05
Banbridge	5·18	14·06
Belfast	4·25	7·00
Carrickfergus	2·00	3·09
Castlereagh	−1·00	−3·00
Coleraine	—	0·00
Cookstown	1·30	4·02
Craigavon	2·45	4·09
Derry	1·40	2·06
Down	—	0·00
Dungannon	1·00	2·09
Fermanagh	2·00	5·03
Larne	—	0·00
Limavady	0·50	1·06
Lisburn	2·60	6·00
Magherafelt	1·10	3·08
Moyle	2·85	5·05
Newry and Mourne	3·00	7·00
Newtownabbey	3·00	6·07
North Down	1·50	3·03
Omagh	2·00	5·01
Strabane	—	0·00

Council	1985-86 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	1·50	3·70
Ards	—	0·00
Armagh	1·00	2·99
Ballymena	0·85	2·39
Ballymoney	1·25	3·05
Banbridge	4·26	10·47
Belfast	4·19	6·46
Carrickfergus	2·25	4·27
Castlereagh	1·00	3·13
Coleraine	2·25	5·26
Cookstown	3·30	10·14
Craigavon	2·01	3·80
Derry	4·40	7·99
Down	—	0·00
Dungannon	3·00	8·57
Fermanagh	2·75	6·88
Larne	1·50	3·45
Limavady	3·00	9·38
Lisburn	0·64	1·40
Magherafelt	2·94	9·77
Moyle	5·00	9·13
Newry and Mourne	3·00	6·52
Newtownabbey	4·60	9·58
North Down	4·50	9·57
Omagh	2·00	4·88
Strabane	2·00	4·82

Council	1986-87 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	3·75	8·93
Ards	3·00	6·00
Armagh	3·50	10·14
Ballymena	1·65	4·54
Ballymoney	3·00	7·10

Council	1986-87 Actual p	per cent.
Banbridge	3·04	6·77
Belfast	7·32	10·60
Carrickfergus	2·50	4·55
Castlereagh	6·08	18·42
Coleraine	4·00	8·89
Cookstown	3·90	10·88
Craigavon	5·28	9·61
Derry	7·50	12·61
Down	8·00	17·78
Dungannon	3·50	9·21
Fermanagh	6·00	14·04
Larne	4·25	9·44
Limavady	4·00	11·43
Lisburn	2·56	5·54
Magherafelt	3·52	10·65
Moyle	6·00	10·04
Newry and Mourne	5·30	10·82
Newtownabbey	2·50	14·77
North Down	5·40	10·49
Omagh	4·00	9·30
Strabane	7·00	16·09

Council	1987-88 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	2·75	6·01
Ards	—	0·00
Armagh	—	0·00
Ballymena	1·85	4·87
Ballymoney	0·75	1·66
Banbridge	3·01	6·27
Belfast	3·67	4·81
Carrickfergus	1·91	3·32
Castlereagh	1·92	4·91
Coleraine	1·00	2·04
Cookstown	3·25	8·18
Craigavon	3·14	5·22
Derry	2·50	3·73
Down	7·00	13·21
Dungannon	2·50	6·02
Fermanagh	2·00	4·10
Larne	3·30	6·70
Limavady	1·95	5·00
Lisburn	0·95	1·95
Magherafelt	4·49	12·28
Moyle	—	0·00
Newry and Mourne	5·40	9·94
Newtownabbey	2·13	3·86
North Down	4·00	7·03
Omagh	4·65	9·89
Strabane	3·50	6·93

Council	1988-89 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	2·50	5·15
Ards	1·00	1·89
Armagh	3·00	7·89
Ballymena	3·00	7·53
Ballymoney	1·00	2·17
Banbridge	—	0·00
Belfast	3·93	4·91
Carrickfergus	3·09	5·20
Castlereagh	−1·10	−2·68
Coleraine	3·00	6·00
Cookstown	−0·25	−0·58
Craigavon	—	0·00
Derry	3·05	4·39
Down	5·00	8·33
Dungannon	—	0·00
Fermanagh	2·75	5·42
Larne	3·20	6·09
Limavady	2·55	6·23

Council	1988-89 Actual p	per cent.
Lisburn	3·82	7·68
Magherafelt	2·45	5·97
Moyle	−025	−038
Newry and Mourne	—	0·00
Newtownabbey	2·82	4·93
North Down	2·80	4·60
Omagh	3·35	6·49
Strabane	3·00	5·56

Council	1989-90 Actual p	Per cent.
Antrim	2·00	3·92
Ards	3·5	6·48
Armagh	3·0	7·32
Ballymena	1·15	2·68
Ballymoney	3·25	6·91
Banbridge	—	0·0
Belfast	—	0·0
Carrickfergus	3·25	5·2
Castlereagh	−2·00	−5·01
Coleraine	2·0	3·77
Cookstown	5·0	11·7
Craigavon	4·12	6·5
Derry	4·25	5·86
Down	3·0	4·62
Dungannon	—	0·0
Fermanagh	2·0	3·74
Larne	1·0	1·79
Limavady	3·5	8·05
Lisburn	—	0·0
Magherafelt	2·84	6·53
Moyle	2·90	4·43
Newry and Mourne	−1·70	−2·85
Newtownabbey	4·04	6·73
North Down	2·15	3·38
Omagh	3·50	6·36
Strabane	3·75	6·58

Council	1990-91 Actual p	per cent.
Antrim	1·50	2·83
Ards	7·50	13·04
Armagh	3·50	7·95
Ballymena	3·00	6·82
Ballymoney	3·75	7·46
Banbridge	3·90	7·65
Belfast	4·12	4·91
Carrickfergus	3·75	5·70
Castlereagh	6·49	17·12
Coleraine	—	0·00
Cookstown	4·00	8·38
Craigavon	3·30	4·89
Derry	7·20	9·38
Down	2·00	2·94
Dungannon	3·75	8·52
Fermanagh	2·00	3·60
Larne	7·93	13·97
Limavady	3·50	7·45
Lisburn	1·99	3·71
Magherafelt	2·66	5·74
Moyle	5·82	8·51
Newry and Mourne	—	0·00
Newtownabbey	0·59	0·92
North Down	3·39	5·15
Omagh	5·80	9·91
Strabane	6·50	10·70

Grant Factors

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the de-rating and resources elements of the general grant factor for each of the past five financial years; and on what basis they were set.

Mr. Needham: The de-rating and resources elements of general exchequer grant for each of the past five financial years are set out in the following table.

The basis on which the grants are set is determined by a Local Government (General Grant) Order made in accordance with paragraph 3(1) of schedule 1 to the Local Government, &c. (Northern Ireland) Order 1972.

The derating and resources elements of the general exchequer grant from 1985-86 to 1989-90

Council	1985-86 Derating element £	Resources element £
Antrim	126,057	186,441
Ards	386,595	467,228
Armagh	132,753	673,465
Ballymena	378,519	37,797
Ballymoney	95,836	337,631
Banbridge	127,936	377,986
Belfast	4,692,549	—
Carrickfergus	161,021	262,629
Castlereagh	307,948	127,352
Coleraine	370,204	—
Cookstown	124,448	346,253
Craigavon	902,136	356,429
Derry	795,414	1,354,865
Down	140,584	919,345
Dungannon	196,697	748,496
Fermanagh	160,977	893,545
Larne	253,222	130,126
Limavady	70,205	357,832
Lisburn	525,986	272,710
Magherafelt	131,018	484,256
Moyle	43,081	329,498
Newry and Mourne	281,471	2,106,016
Newtownabbey	1,027,691	—
North Down	211,480	135,612
Omagh	100,362	1,009,624
Strabane	136,141	1,027,075

Council	1986-87 Derating element £	Resources element £
Antrim	140,551	229,725
Ards	418,708	727,214
Armagh	147,765	726,548
Ballymena	400,601	114,608
Ballymoney	110,205	347,766
Banbridge	138,868	390,554
Belfast	5,122,136	—
Carrickfergus	141,018	289,656
Castlereagh	366,486	159,805
Coleraine	342,722	—
Cookstown	138,876	340,354
Craigavon	938,657	317,874
Derry	905,216	1,505,856
Down	166,625	1,069,027
Dungannon	218,230	669,120
Fermanagh	191,402	953,378
Larne	282,811	112,889
Limavady	78,025	408,019
Lisburn	566,277	523,667
Magherafelt	148,519	474,737
Moyle	48,889	398,380
Newry and Mourne	299,790	2,298,468
Newtownabbey	1,050,207	—

Council	Derating element £	Resources element £
North Down	243,549	411,987
Omagh	109,902	916,851
Strabane	159,922	937,455

1987-88

Council	Derating element £	Resources element £
Antrim	146,900	166,594
Ards	429,833	714,169
Armagh	150,996	783,598
Ballymena	424,152	16,862
Ballymoney	116,584	483,587
Banbridge	148,134	457,299
Belfast	5,368,404	—
Carrickfergus	112,449	349,879
Castlereagh	359,491	67,066
Coleraine	288,401	—
Cookstown	150,418	367,047
Craigavon	1,013,227	490,057
Derry	951,978	1,565,317
Down	193,953	1,233,968
Dungannon	233,012	738,841
Fermanagh	206,270	987,073
Larne	306,533	65,507
Limavady	83,825	439,041
Lisburn	566,119	449,561
Magherafelt	169,212	518,527
Moyle	50,788	412,355
Newry and Mourne	337,411	2,295,578
Newtownabbey	1,053,659	—
North Down	270,383	310,922
Omagh	122,545	992,155
Strabane	167,243	1,075,959

1988-89

Council	Derating element £	Resources element £
Antrim	153,926	76,180
Ards	443,215	666,750
Armagh	163,613	753,508
Ballymena	463,535	4,713
Ballymoney	123,032	430,856
Banbridge	146,384	440,482
Belfast	5,680,258	—
Carrickfergus	131,957	317,551
Castlereagh	331,884	98,137
Coleraine	311,666	—
Cookstown	150,765	326,749
Craigavon	1,027,812	477,945
Derry	1,009,969	1,688,677
Down	221,091	1,216,268
Dungannon	239,443	703,158
Fermanagh	222,697	893,509
Larne	326,908	63,722
Limavady	91,399	516,331
Lisburn	619,286	498,333
Magherafelt	182,270	529,641
Moyle	51,664	406,279
Newry and Mourne	345,298	2,325,076
Newtownabbey	986,500	—
North Down	281,056	310,225
Omagh	133,486	973,321
Strabane	176,010	1,028,500

1989-90

Council	Derating element £	Resources element £
Antrim	167,073	88,870
Ards	472,128	665,198
Armagh	169,540	783,284
Ballymena	489,728	17,816
Ballymoney	135,581	395,177
Banbridge	147,991	443,222
Belfast	5,600,725	—
Carrickfergus	160,755	364,581
Castlereagh	336,583	16,030
Coleraine	330,250	—
Cookstown	174,634	354,176
Craigavon	1,112,690	416,548
Derry	1,060,634	1,951,544
Down	234,793	1,218,476
Dungannon	248,728	737,570
Fermanagh	236,190	914,427
Larne	338,432	58,062
Limavady	99,362	522,104
Lisburn	657,792	394,805
Magherafelt	198,064	530,801
Moyle	54,942	349,535
Newry and Mourne	350,273	2,249,375
Newtownabbey	985,802	—
North Down	284,166	380,510
Omagh	148,647	994,195
Strabane	208,586	1,077,913

Power Station Emissions

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how soon he expects energy developments in Northern Ireland will enable requirements of EC directives on sulphur dioxide emissions from power stations to be complied with; and whether he envisages the use of natural gas for generating electricity to reduce noxious emissions from power stations in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: I recently wrote to the chairman of Northern Ireland Electricity confirming that, if it is built as coal/oil-fired plant, the proposed phase II generating station at Kilroot would require flue gas desulphurisation. The letter also acknowledges that one of the alternative options, which envisages Kilroot phase II being completed as a natural gas fired plant, would satisfy the requirements of the EC large combustion plants directive. However, the technical and economic feasibility of using natural gas for power generation is still being assessed and no decision has yet been taken.

Hazelbank-Macedon Area

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the reservation of the Hazelbank-Macedon area in the Belfast urban area plan 2001 for landscape, amenity or recreation use provides protection to the area from office-housing development.

Mr. Needham: All planning applications are considered on their merits having regard to the development plan for the area and to any other material considerations. It is likely that any future planning application for office or housing development on this site would be the subject of a public local inquiry under the terms of article 22 of the Planning (NI) Order 1972.

Hotel Development

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hotel development applications in Northern Ireland have been approved in lands restricted for landscape, amenity or recreation use.

Mr. Needham: Since 1987 planning permission for 21 such proposals has been granted by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

Hazardous Waste, Maydown

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information regarding the proposal to site a hazardous waste incinerator at Dupont's Maydown complex has been furnishd to the DED's health and safety inspectorate; and what action the inspectorate is now undertaking.

Mr. Needham: Du Pont (UK) Limited has provided the Department of Economic Development's health and safety inspectorate with outline information concerning the possible siting of a toxic waste incinerator at Maydown, Co. Londonderry, and the inspectorate is continuing to monitor health and safety aspects of the company's proposals as further details become available.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *470*, what consultation the DOE environmental protection division have had regarding the proposed siting of a hazardous waste incinerator at Du Pont's Maydown complex; what information has been furnished to the division regarding the proposal; and what advice it has given or action it has taken on the matter to date.

Mr. Needham: The environmental protection division of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland was advised by Du Pont (UK) Ltd of the proposal to establish a hazardous waste incinerator on its site at Maydown in October 1990. In December 1990 the company confirmed in writing that the evaluation of the project was under way. Officials from the Department's environmental protection division will be available for consultation with the company.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *471*, if he will make a statement indicating the scope and nature of informal discussion of the proposed hazardous waste incinerator at Maydown between officials of the United Kingdom and Irish Governments.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the joint statement of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which took place in Dublin on 31 January 1991.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining Government policy on balancing the needs of environmental protection and public safety and perceived job creation benefits indicating in which Northern Ireland Government Department the principal responsibility for assessing the balance rests.

Mr. Needham: Proposals for job creation must weigh and reconcile priorities in the public interest. These priorities include the protection of the environment. Responsibility for assessing the proper balance lies jointly with the Government Departments most immediately involved in such proposals, having regard to their relevant statutory functions in securing environmental protection and public safety. By virtue of its wide-ranging remit, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has a significant role in such joint assessments.

Waste Imports

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what proportion of waste incinerated within Northern Ireland is imported; and what are the projected levels of such importation for the next decade;

(2) in what quantities per nation annually European toxic waste has been imported by Northern Ireland for each year since 1979;

(3) what quantity of waste, in the last year for which figures are available, was imported for direct landfill within Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: None.

HEALTH

Health Services, Kent

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, for each parliamentary constituency in Kent what percentage of the population are local authority tenants according to the 1981 census.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the table:

Persons in households renting from local authority as a percentage of all persons

Parliamentary constituency	*per cent.*
Ashford	31
Canterbury	22
Dartford	25
Dover	27
Faversham	15
Folkestone and Hythe	17
Gravesham	27
Maidstone	25
Medway	24
Mid Kent	21
North Thanet	16
Sevenoaks	23
South Thanet	18
Tonbridge and Malling	22
Tunbridge Wells	21
Gillingham	14

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authority covers which parliamentary constituency in Kent.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is as follows:

Bexley Health Authority
- Bexleyheath
- Erith and Crayford
- Old Bexley and Sidcup

Bromley Health Authority
- Beckenham
- Chislehurst
- Orpington
- Ravensbourne

Canterbury and Thanet Health Authority
- Canterbury
- Thanet North

Thanet South
Dover
Faversham

Dartford and Gravesham Health Authority
Dartford
Gravesham
Sevenoaks

Maidstone Health Authority
Maidstone
Tonbridge and Malling
Mid-Kent

Medway Health Authority
Medway
Faversham
Mid-Kent
Gillingham

South East Kent Health Authority
Dover
Ashford
Folkestone and Hythe

Tunbridge Wells Health Authority
Sevenoaks
Tonbridge and Malling
Tunbridge Wells

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each health authority covering the Kent area, which hospitals have been granted permission to establish a national health service trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No hospitals in Kent have been given approval for national health service trust status to date.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, for each health authority covering the Kent area, which hospitals have indicated an interest in establishing a national health service trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

Bexley district health authority
Bexley Acute and Community Services
Bexley Mental Health and Mental Handicap Services

Dartford and Gravesham district health authority
Dartford and Gravesham Acute Unit
Dartford and Gravesham Priority Services Unit

Maidstone district health authority
Maidstone Acute and Community Unit
Maidstone Mental Handicap Unit

Tunbridge Wells district health authority
Tunbridge Wells mental handicap services
Queen Victoria hospital, East Grinstead
Sevenoaks hospital

Bromley district health authority
Bromley Acute Services
Bromley Priority Services

South East Kent district health authority
South East Kent Health Authority Community Services
William Harvey and Buckland hospitals

Census Statistics

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, for each parliamentary constituency in Kent, (1) what percentage of the population are *(a)* Asian and *(b)* black according to the 1981 census;

(2) what percentage of the population are *(a)* Asian and *(b)* black according to the latest information updated since the 1981 census.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available. There was no question on ethnic group in the 1981 census.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, for each parliamentary constituency in Kent, what percentage of the population are owner occupiers according to the 1981 census.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the table:

Parliamentary constituency	*Persons in owner occupier households as a percentage of all persons*
Ashford	61
Canterbury	65
Dartford	67
Dover	59
Faversham	77
Folkestone and Hythe	67
Gravesham	66
Maidstone	66
Medway	67
Mid Kent	70
North Thanet	72
Sevenoaks	66
South Thanet	70
Tonbridge and Malling	68
Tunbridge Wells	63
Gillingham	77

Over Hospital

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek a report from Gloucester health authority regarding the extent of consultation during the partial closure of Over hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: The Community Health Council Regulations 1985, as amended, provide that a health authority need not consult on any variation of service if the authority

"is satisfied that, in the interest of the health service, a decision has to be taken without allowing time for consultation. In this circumstance the district health authority shall immediately notify the community health council of the decision".

This was the case in the partial closure of Over hospital, which was both urgent and temporary. The community health council was notified immediately of Gloucester district health authority's decision.

I understand that if Gloucester health authority decides to make this temporary closure permanent, it will consult.

Laboratory Services

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statutory provisions apply to the contracting out of laboratory services by regional and district health authorities; if he is required to approve the terms of such contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under section 23 of the National Health Service Act 1977, and regulations made under that Act, regional and district health authorities exercising the Secretary of State's functions have the power to arrange for non-NHS bodies to provide services

under that Act. The Secretary of State's approval of the terms of contracts is not required as the health authorities concerned would be acting on his behalf in arranging such contracts. Key issues for health authorities to take into account are the need for appropriate involvement of the individuals and groups concerned and the achievement of cost-effectiveness.

Mental Illness

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of readmissions to mental illness hospitals and units in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Dorrell: The table provides the numbers of admissions to national health service mental illness hospitals and hospital units where these admissions are known not to be a first admission to a national health service psychiatric hospital or hospital unit. The figures relate to admissions, and not individuals, since a person may be readmitted more than once during a year.

Reliable centrally collected figures by admission status for years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 are not yet available. When figures are available they will not be directly comparable with earlier data.

Year	*Readmissions*
1977	118,792
1978	120,456
1979	120,073
1980	127,184
1981	132,893
1982	133,475
1983	138,080
1984	138,431
1985	146,895
1986	145,578

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the mental illness hospitals planned for closure by 1996 by the health authorities concerned with the total number of beds in each and the number of beds currently occupied by patients.

Mr. Dorrell: The tables show mental handicap and mental illness hospitals planned for closure over the next five years and the district health authority in which each hospital is situated. The other information requested is not held centrally.

Table 1

Mental handicap hospitals	*DHA*
South East Thames	
Leybourne Grange	Maidstone (managed by Tunbridge Wells)
Eastry	Canterbury and Thanet
Grove Park	Lewisham and North Southwark
Laughton Lodge	Eastbourne
Mount Pleasant	Hastings
Yorkshire	
Brandesburton	Hull
Claypenny	York
Whixley	Harrogate
Stansfield	Caldergate
Caister	Grimsby (located in North Lincolnshire but managed by Grimsby)
Oxford	
Wayland Hospital	West Berkshire
Trent	
Aston Hall	Southern Derbyshire
Balderton	Central Nottinghamshire
Wessex	
Coldharbour	West Dorset
Burderop	Swindon
Pewsey	Swindon
East Anglian	
Risbridge	West Suffolk
Lothingland	Great Yarmouth and Waveney
Jane Walker	East Suffolk
Hadleigh House	East Suffolk
Hales Hospital	Norwich
North Western	
Brockhall Hospital	Hyndburn and Ribble Valley
Scott House	Rochdale
Offerton House	Stockport

Table 2

Mental illness hospitals	*DHA*
Northern	
St. Mary's, Stannington	Gateshead
Yorkshire	
Storthes Hall Hospital	Huddersfield
Clifton Hospital	York
Stanley Royd Hospital	Wakefield
Scalebor Park Hospital	Airedale
Trent	
Pastures Hospital	South Derbyshire
East Anglia	
St. Audry's Hospital	East Suffolk
St. Nicholas' Hospital	Great Yarmouth and Waveney
St. Andrews	Norwich
North West Thames	
Nil	
North East Thames	
Friern Hospital[1]	Hampstead
South East Thames	
Cane Hill Hospital	Croydon (managed by Bromley)
Tooting Bec Hospital	Wandsworth (managed by West Lambeth)
Hellingley Hospital	Eastbourne
St. Augustine's Hospital	Canterbury and Thanet
Maidstone Hospital (psychiatric wing)	Maidstone
South West Thames	
Long Grove Hospital, Epsom	Kingston and Esher
Brookwood Hospital	South West Surrey
Wessex	
Whitecroft Hospital	Isle of Wight
Herrison Hospital, Dorchester	West Dorset
Old Manor Hospital, Salisbury[1]	Salisbury
Oxford	
St. John's Hospital	Aylesbury Vale
Fairmile Hospital	West Berkshire
Littlemore Hospital	Oxford
South Western	
Coney Hill Hospital	Gloucester
Moorhaven Hospital	Plymouth
Tone Vale Hospital, Taunton	Somerset

Mental illness hospitals	*DHA*
West Midlands	
Barnsley Hall Hospital	Bromsgrove and Redditch
Rubery Hill Hospital	South Birmingham
Central Hospital	South Warwickshire
Hollymoor Hospital	Solihull
Mersey	
Rainhill Hospital	St. Helens and Knowlsley
Winwick Hospital	Warrington
North Western	
Nil	

[1] With some facilities remaining on site.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish comprehensive statistics about mentally ill hospital patients comparable to those in the DHSS statistical bulletins which ceased in 1986.

Mr. Dorrell: The Körner recommendations on health services information were implemented for each financial year, commencing from 1 April 1987. These recommendations involved several definitional changes to information collected by the national health service and some statistics comparable with those previously published are no longer available from central returns. Some information on mental illness is contained in the forthcoming booklet, "Hospital Episode System—Summary Tables for England —1987/88"—a copy of which will be placed in the Library. Further estimates for activity within the specialties of mental illness and mental handicap will be published in a bulletin later in 1991.

GP Services

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the level of achievement of the targets set for childhood immunisation and cervical screening for each area of general practice as defined by the Jarman index.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is not available in the form requested. For information on the proportion of doctors receiving a target payment in each family health services authority I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 11 February at columns *351-56*.

Physically Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on unaided access for physically disabled people to NHS facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities are required to comply with building regulations which contain requirements in respect of access for disabled people. From 1 April this year, building regulations will be legally enforceable on the NHS. In 1989, the Department published guidance on designing hospital facilities to meet the needs of disabled people which the NHS is encouraged to use and which exceeds the requirements of building regulations.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase unaided access to NHS facilities for physically disabled people.

Mr. Dorrell: The national health service will be legally bound by the new standards in respect of access for disabled people which are soon to be introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the Royal College of Physicians' report on health services for adults with physical disabilities.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has received copies of the report and a copy will be placed in the Library. We welcome it as a timely contribution to the process of improving services for disabled people. It gives a clear picture of the present situation and will be a considerable help to those at all levels in the National Health Service who are concerned with the planning and operation of these services.

Disabled Young People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he is taking to ensure that all district health authorities prepare and enforce formal arrangements for the transfer of disabled young people from paediatric to other consultants; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has on the number of district health authorities that have prepared and enforced formal arrangements for the transfer of disabled young people from paediatric to other consultants.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1988 health authorities were asked to ensure appropriate planning for disabled young people on moving from child to adult health services. The need to ensure continuity in the supervision of their health care will also be underlined in guidance currently being prepared on the welfare of children and young people in hospital. The available information is contained in the Royal College of Physicians' report on health services for adults with physical disabilities.

GP Centre, Cheam

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will meet Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth family practitioners' officials to review the funding arrangements for the new general practitioner centre in Malden road, Cheam; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: General medical practitioners, as independent contractors, are responsible for providing their own practice premises. From 1 April 1990 family health services authorities have been allocated cash-limited funds with which to finance improvements to GPs' practice premises under the cost rent and improvement grant schemes.

It is for Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth family health services authority to administer its allocations on the basis of best value for money, taking into account local needs and priorities. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. J. Speirs, the chairman of Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth family health services authority regarding the funding arrangements for the general practitioner centre in Malden road, Cheam.

Kidney Machines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of providing a dialysis unit; what is the running cost; and how many would be required to provide dialysis for all persons judged to be in need of it.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally. The planning and provision of renal services is a matter for health authorities to decide, taking into account local needs and priorities.

St. Paul's Eye Hospital

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether St. Paul's Eye hospital in Liverpool has been put on the market for sale.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the future of St. Paul's eye hospital in Liverpool is currently the subject of consultation.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes. Liverpool health authority issued proposals for the closure of St. Paul's eye hospital on 21 November 1990 and invited comments by 22 January. The closing date for comments has now been extended to 19 February.

Training

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received the application for funding of the Project 2000 training programme submitted on behalf of the Thames College of Health Care Studies; and when he expects to give his decision.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Project 2000 submission from South East Thames regional health authority, identifying Thames college of health care studies as the region's first choice for funding in 1991-92, was received on 25 January 1991. This submission, with the others which have been received, is being referred for consideration to the Project 2000 implementation group. Decisions on funding will be taken in the light of the implementation group's recommendations and will be announced as soon as possible.

Wheelchairs

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has now approved a particular design for a powered wheelchair for the use of patients in hospital or suffering disability.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department provides an evaluation service to assist NHS prescribers, rather than approve wheelchairs for health service use, as such.

Chemotherapy

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that where use of the drug Ondansetron is judged clinically to be of help to patients receiving chemotherapy sufficient funding is available to enable it to be prescribed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Ondansetron is available for prescription by doctors throughout the national health service for the prevention of nausea and vomiting in patients undergoing chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy for cancer.

It is for the individual doctor to decide whether to prescribe Ondansetron, or indeed any drug, in a given set of circumstances. In many districts drug and therapeutic committees have been set up to secure the agreement and commitment of clinicians to an efficacious and economical system of drug usage and have drawn up formularies of preferred treatments. It is for health authorities to determine what financial allocation should be made available to any particular area of clinical care, including the provision of drugs.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his calculations of the additional costs that may be incurred through entitlement to *(a)* free prescriptions, *(b)* free dental treatment, *(c)* travelling costs to hospitals and *(d)* vouchers for glasses for those people in receipt of disability working allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* Disability working allowance does not exempt claimants from normal NHS charges unless they are exempt for other reasons—for example, a qualifying medical condition—or are entitled to full or partial remission under the NHS low income scheme.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the percentage of the population yet to pay their 1990 poll tax *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Nottingham; and what additional cost is necessary per poll tax payer to make good the deficit.

Mr. Key: My Department has estimated, based on returns from three quarters of all authorities, that in England, no payment had been made by 31 December by 11 per cent. of persons with a liability in respect of a personal community charge. In Nottingham the figure is 23 per cent.

Comparable figures for Scotland and Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales.

It is too early to say what charges payable in 1990-91 will prove to be uncollectable. The effect on chargepayers in future years will be minimised if authorities use all the means at their disposal to ensure that charges are paid in full.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the lowest poll tax charge in England; and what would be the total increase in central Government expenditure required to reduce all charges to this level.

Mr. Key: The lowest average community charge in England in 1990-91 was £150, in the London borough of Wandsworth. Assuming that local authorities do not change their budgets, and making no allowance for the reductions in community charge benefit grant and transitional relief grant that would result, central Government grants would need to increase by £7 billion in order for all authorities to set a charge of £150.

Public Transport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much the standard spending assessment for 1991-92 of London boroughs and the City of London has been reduced to reflect the fact that they do not provide support for public transport; what that figure is per adult; and if he will give the equivalent figures for 1990-91.

Mr. Key: The total 1991-92 standard spending assessment for London boroughs and the City has been reduced by about £160 million, equivalent to £31·40p per adult, to reflect the fact that they do not provide support for public transport. The equivalent figures for 1990-91 are £121 million and £24·01p per adult.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much public money has been paid to the unsuccessful Crown Suppliers contract furnishings management buy-out team;

(2) what is the total amount of public money paid to the Crown Suppliers contract furnishing division buy-out team.

Mr. Yeo: A total of £76,980, in support of their professional advisers' fees.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what improprieties by the Crown Suppliers main board members have been indicated from internal departmental investigations over the last three years.

Mr. Yeo: Irregularities in respect of travel claims, acceptance of hospitality and the appointment of consultants; only one case was sufficiently serious to justify disciplinary action.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many performance pay bonuses have been awarded to the Crown Suppliers board in the period 1 January 1990 to 1 January 1991; and what was the total cost of those bonuses.

Mr. Yeo: Two, at a cost of £1,357·87.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total estimated cost of closing the Crown Suppliers contract furnishings division.

Mr. Yeo: At this stage it is too early to provide a firm estimate. The costs incurred to date are about £6·3 million.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place all those Property Services Agency internal audit reports on Crown Suppliers purchasing practice which have been produced since 1989 in the Library.

Mr. Yeo: It would be inappropriate to make internal audit reports generally available; such reports are, however, made available to the National Audit Office and used by the Comptroller and Audit General to inform his examination of the Department's work.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total cost from 1984 to date of the Government's proposed privatisation of the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Yeo: Since 3 February 1988 when the privatisation decision was announced, the cost of the Government's advisers' fees; of support for management buy-out teams' advisers' fees; and of the unit set up to oversee the privatisation, has amounted to £1·3 million.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total cost of settled claims to date which have directly arisen from the closure of the contracts furnishing division of the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Yeo: A total of £408,670·36.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the future of the Crown Suppliers vehicle hire and maintenance division.

Mr. Yeo: An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total cost to date of the design, installation and maintenance of the Crown Suppliers UNISYS system.

Mr. Yeo: The total cost between April 1988 and December 1990 of the design, installation and maintenance of the current Crown Suppliers UNISYS computer system was £9·78 million.

Housing, Kent

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what were the figures for homelessness for each parliamentary constituency in Kent in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989;

(2) if he will list the local authority housing departments which cover each parliamentary constituency in Kent.

(3) how many council houses have been bought in each parliamentary constituency in Kent since 1979;

(4) what were the figures for homelessness for each local authority housing department in the Kent area in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989;

(5) how many council houses have been bought in each housing authority in Kent since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The table gives each parliamentary constituency in Kent together with their respective local authority housing department(s). In all but four constituencies, the constituency consists of part of one or more local authority areas.

Constituency	*Local authority(ies)*
Ashford	Ashford
Canterbury	Canterbury (part), Swale (part)
Dartford	Dartford, Sevenoaks (part)
Dover	Dover (part)
Faversham	Swale (part)
Folkestone and Hythe	Shepway
Gillingham	Gillingham, Swale (part)
Gravesham	Gravesham
Maidstone	Maidstone (part)
Medway	Rochester upon Medway (part)
Mid-Kent	Maidstone (part), Rochester upon Medway (part)
North Thanet	Canterbury (part), Thanet (part)
Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks (part)
South Thanet	Thanet (part), Dover (part)
Tonbridge and Malling	Tonbridge and Malling
Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells

Local authorities report the number of households accepted and found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985. Annual figures for each local authority in Kent are given in "Local Housing Statistics"; the figures for 1979 are in table 14 of edition No. 54 and the figures for 1989 are in table 9(b) of edition No. 94

A table showing the available information on sales for each English local authority for each financial year since 1986-87 and with a cumulative total to September 1990 was recently placed in the Library—*Official Report*, 30 January 1991, column *542*.

Late returns from Canterbury, Maidstone, Rochester upon Medway and Shepway revise the totals shown in the table as follows:

	Sales 1 April 1979 to 30 September 1990	*Sales as per cent. of stock*
Canterbury		
rtb sales	2,152	24·2
all sales	2,600	29·2
of which flats	156	—
Maidstone		
rtb sales	1,861	16·9
all sales	2,741	24·9
of which flats	142	—
Rochester upon Medway		
rtb sales	[1]4,100	[1]30·4
all sales	[1]13,166	[1]97·6
of which flats	[1]481	—
Shepway		
rtb sales	1,428	24·7
all sales	1,669	28·8
of which flats	127	—

[1] Incomplete numbers of sales.

Of the 14 local housing authorities in Kent three have transferred their remaining stock to a housing association —Sevenoaks—March 1989, Swale—March 1990, Tonbridge and Malling—January 1991. Rochester upon Medway transferred its remaining stock to a private company in July 1990.

It is not possible to give the homelessness acceptance figures or the numbers of sales for all the parliamentary constituencies in Kent. These statistics are available only by local authority area.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the 1990 capital allocation to each local authority housing department covering the Kent area;

(2) what was the 1990 housing investment programme capital bid by each local authority housing authority department covering the Kent area.

Mr. Yeo: A table listing Housing Investment Programme allocations for 1991-92 for each local authority was placed in the Library on 13 December 1990. Local authorities' proposals for gross capital expenditure in 1991-92 were as follows:

	£ thousands
Ashford	9,949
Canterbury	11,715
Dartford	5,218
Dover	5,819
Gillingham	8,118
Gravesham	7,094
Maidstone	14,405
Rochester upon Medway	10,494
Sevenoaks	8,773
Shepway	5,093
Swale	11,547
Thanet	4,899
Tonbridge and Malling	3,900
Tunbridge Wells	4,516

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) according to information submitted to support 1990's capital allocation bids under the housing investment programme, what was the number of unfit properties in each local authority in Kent;

(2) according to information submitted to support 1990's capital allocation bids under the housing investment programme, what was the number of *(a)* unfit housing association properties, *(b)* unfit public sector properties and *(c)* unfit private sector properties within the area of each local authority housing department in Kent.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of unfit dwellings in their own stock, and estimates of those owned by housing associations, other public sector bodies and in the private sector, in their annual housing investment programme returns—HIP1. The available figures for 1 April 1990 appear in "1990 HIP1 All Items Print", columns A31, A32, A33, and A34 respectively; a copy of which is in the Library.

MOD Quality Assurance Unit

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what expenditure has been incurred by the Teesside development corporation in preparation for the promised move of the MOD quality assurance unit to Preston farm, Stockton.

Mr. Key: Teesside development corporation has incurred expenditure totalling £2·47 million, including land acquisition and site preparation costs, on the site earmarked for the relocation of the MOD quality assurance organisation.

Structure Plans

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what economic factors he takes into account when approving structure plans.

Sir George Young: Local planning authorities are required to base their structure plans on an appreciation of the economic characteristics of their area, and the effect that any changes in them are likely to have on the development of their area and the planning of such development. They also take account of national and regional economic policies and the resources likely to be available for carrying out their structure plan proposals. The Secretary of State similarly takes these matters into account in his approval of structure plan proposals.

Vipera Berus

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to extend full protection to vipera berus; and if he will make a statement on any other amendments he proposes to seek to make to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in respect of species protection.

Mr. Baldry: Following advice from the Nature Conservancy Council, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment and the Countryside announced on 3 January that the Government had decided to introduce new protective measures for three species, including vipera berus, the adder. I have arranged for a copy of the news release to be placed in the Library of the House.

The necessary instrument to give effect to these changes will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Staff Negotiations

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department intends issuing a statement or circular on the implementation of section 12 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; and what communications he has received concerning the problems of implementing section 12.

Mr. Key: My Department has no plans to issue any general guidance on section 12 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which requires local authorities to avoid having their interests in negotiations with their staff on pay and conditions of service represented by councillors who are themselves local council employees or officers of trade unions representing local authority employees. My Department has received from a number of local authorities queries about the application of the section and other representations.

Humberside County Council

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission on the future of Humberside county council to be implemented.

Mr. Key: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has, as yet, made no recommendations as a result of its further review of the county of Humberside. It is, therefore, premature to speculate on the implementation of any such recommendations.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the whereabouts and possible destination of the Karin B waste.

Mr. Trippier: I understand that Rechem has accepted some of this waste for disposal at its high temperature incinerators at Pontypool in Torfaen district and Fawley in Hampshire and has complied with the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988.

Housing, Tandridge

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council homes are owned by Tandridge district council, east Surrey; and what percentage is vacant.

Sir George Young: The number of council-owned dwellings reported by Tandridge district council in its April 1990 housing investment programme return—HIP1—was 3,567, of which some 2 per cent. or, 72, were vacant.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in the level of registered homeless persons in Tandridge district, east Surrey, in the last 12 months.

Sir George Young: Local authorities report each quarter the number of households for which they accepted responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985.

There has been no significant change in the number of households accepted as homeless by Tandridge district council over the 12 months to September 1990.

The latest reported figures for individual local authorities, including those for Tandridge district, appear in a table of "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England. Results for the third quarter 1990. Supplementary Tables".

Copies of this document and those for previous quarters are in the Library.

Council House Sales

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to when Mrs. Jean Hopwood of 12a Therapia road, SE22, may expect completion of the purchase of her home from the London borough of Southwark under the right-to-buy scheme.

Mr. Yeo: I understand that this case has been subject to delay and involves some unresolved negotiations. I trust that Southwark council will do everything that it can to enable satisfactory completion of the sale. The Government have introduced measures which enable tenants to seek financial redress in cases where local authorities do not perform within statutory time limits. These are available, if appropriate, in this case.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will participate in, or be represented at, the conference on the management of spent nuclear fuel to be held in London, 29-30 April.

Mr. Trippier: My Department will not be represented at the conference on the management of spent nuclear fuel on 29 and 30 April.

Environment Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will participate in the conference on paying for water, effluent and pollution control 1991-92, to be held in London on 13 February.

Mr. Trippier: No, but I understand that the Office of Water Services is providing one of the speakers.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has been invited to participate in the conference, "What on Earth is to be Done?", to be held in London on 19 March.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has accepted an invitation to give the opening speech at this conference.

Water Mains

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to bring forward legislation requiring water authorities to contribute to the costs of highway reconstruction following water main bursts.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

The answer is yes. The Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950 contains provisions on the liability of water authorities and other undertakers to highway authorities for damage caused to the property of the highway authority. A distinction is drawn between damage caused as a consequence of the exercise of an undertaker's statutory powers and that caused as a consequence of the carrying out of a statutory duty. The law as it stands is unsatisfactory and has led to a number of disputes over the apportionment of the costs of repairing the road following a burst main. The New Roads and Street Works Bill now before Parliament would replace the 1950 Act provision with a straightforward duty on undertakers to compensate the highway authority in respect of any damage or loss suffered by the authority as a result of the execution of street works or an event such as a burst main.

Housing Associations

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of housing association build is built to *(a)* wheelchair standard and *(b)* mobility standard.

Mr. Yeo *[pursuant to his reply, 30 January 1991 c. 538]:* Approximately 3 per cent. of housing association completions of new dwellings in England reported to my Department in the year ending September 1990 were dwellings for the chronically sick and disabled, built to mobility standards. A further 0·5 per cent. were dwellings for the chronically sick and disabled built to wheelchair standards.

Community Charge

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received any representations about the exercise of his community charge-capping powers in relation to the proposed 1991-92 budget for West Yorkshire police authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* We have received a number of representations from and on behalf of the West Yorkshire police authority about our intentions for charge capping for 1991-92, including those made when I met a delegation from the authority on 29 November 1990.

As my right hon. Friend told the House on 29 January, we stand firmly by these intentions which are, however, necessarily provisional, since, under the statute, capping decisions cannot be made until authorities have set their budgets. It is now for each authority to set its budget having regard to all relevant considerations including its statutory duties, the approved level of police manpower, our intended capping criteria, the need as appropriate for expenditure restraint, and the scope for greater efficiency.

Solvent

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of used solvent is imported to the United Kingdom; and what proportion of this is *(a)* originally exported from the United Kingdom and *(b)* imported to the manufacturer for disposal.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* The import of used solvent which is special waste is subject to the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980. Records of shipments made under these regulations are maintained by the disposal authorities concerned and not by the Department. The producer of the waste is identified but not the manufacturer of the original solvent.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that importation of waste substances for recycling results in the recycling of all the materials imported.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* Under the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988 which implement European Community directive 84/631 as amended on transfrontier shipments, hazardous waste that is imported for recycling must be subject to a contract between the producer of the waste and the recycler to the effect that the waste will be recycled. It is proposed in the draft Council regulation on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community to extend the use of contracts binding the producer and the recycler to all imports of waste, except for certain categories of waste —to be determined—which are completely innocuous.

Hazardous and Toxic Waste

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to define in legislation the terms hazardous waste and toxic waste.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* Hazardous waste and toxic waste are equated in British legislation to special waste. Special waste is defined in the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980. These regulations will be revised in due course to reflect the definition of hazardous waste which will be made under the new EC directive on hazardous waste agreed at the Environment Council on 21 December 1990.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Grant-maintained Schools

13. Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on progress on grant-maintained schools.

15. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications he has received from schools for grant-maintained status; and if he will make a statement.

18. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress of grant-maintained status awarded to schools.

Mr. Eggar: A total of 93 schools have now submitted proposals to my right hon. and learned Friend, and he is awaiting a further 18 proposals following ballots in favour. Of the 93 applications, 60 have been approved, 12 rejected and 21 have yet to be decided.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will outline the advantages to pupils, parents and teachers of a school opting for grant-maintained status and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: GM schools have many advantages for pupils, parents and teachers. The schools are run by local people; they can make their own decisions about how to make the best use of resources, including a part of LEA expenditure on centrally provided services; their governors and heads have greater autonomy than is provided by local management of schools; and they are proving popular with parents.

Postgraduate Research

14. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current numbers in Scottish universities undertaking post-graduate research in physics, chemistry and mathematics; and what were the comparable figures for 1990, 1989 and 1988.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The numbers of postgraduate students at Scottish universities in physics, chemistry and mathematics were 317, 422 and 135 respectively in the academic year 1989-90. The comparable figures for 1988-89 were 350, 431 and 103. Figures are not yet available for the current academic year.

RE Teachers

16. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many qualified religious education teachers are currently employed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: In 1988 three were approximately 13,300 full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England with a qualification in religious education, of whom 6,400 were teaching the subject.

Cricket Coaching

17. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the coaching of cricket in schools.

Mr. Atkins: Many schools offer their pupils the opportunity to take part in cricket and I am keen that schools continue to teach the game. PE including sport is a compulsory part of the school curriculum. In addition, the Sports Council provides funding to help develop sports coaching and facilities, and will soon be publishing a review of coaching and coach education.

Paperwork

19. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to reduce the amount of paperwork in schools as a result of the introduction of the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: The Government have already acted to cut schools' paperwork. I recently announced that we had agreed with the National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council to restrict the amount of non-essential guidance and other material sent to schools. We hope that other bodies, including LEAs' will follow our example.

Scientific Research

20. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of the Science and Engineering Research Council to discuss the funding of scientific research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend occasionally meets the chairman of the Science and Engineering Research Council. I have met Sir Mark Richmond twice recently when the funding of scientific research was among the issues discussed.

Education Spending

21. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by what percentage the education component of standard spending assessment is due to rise between 1990-91 and 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The education components of standard spending assessments in England will rise by an average of 16 per cent. between 1990-91 and 1991-92. This substantial increase, far in excess of the likely rate of inflation, should enable all authorities to deliver education services of a high quality if they manage their affairs well.

History

22. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received following the publication of his report about history in the national curriculum.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsey).

Primary Schools

23. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many four-year-old children were admitted to primary schools in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The total number of four-year-olds admitted to primary classes in maintained schools in England in September 1989 and January 1990 was 441,100. For the previous year the figure was 410,900.

Nursery Education

24. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he proposes to take in respect of the part of his "Starting with Quality" report on under-fives dealing with the number of places in nursery education.

26. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to increase the number of places in nursery education.

Mr. Eggar: The committee of inquiry urged increases in overall provision for the under-fives—including childcare—rather than in nursery education specifically. It is for local authorities to decide how far this can be given priority. Much is being done: the numbers of under-fives in maintained schools went up by 29,000 between 1989 and 1990.

Teachers' Pay

25. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the latest figures for the real increase in teachers' pay since 1979.

Mr. Eggar: Teachers' average salaries have increased by some 30 per cent. in real terms since 1979. When the IAC's latest recommendations are fully implemented it is likely that there will be a further real terms increase as inflation is likely to fall over the coming year.

Local Management of Schools

27. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the purpose of the local management of schools scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The key aims of the local management of schools are to ensure that resources are allocated to schools in a fair and open way, based mainly on the number of pupils they have to educate; and that as much as is reasonably possible of local authorities' potential schools budget is delegated to schools, to manage as they see fit.

I expect the introduction of the local management of schools to benefit all schools. Many schools are already experiencing those benefits; many more will do so when formula funding and delegated management have been fully implemented in every local education authority.

Rural Schools

28. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what policies exist to aid small rural schools.

Mr. Fallon: The Government's policies for promoting improvements in the education service through the implementation of the national curriculum, through the local management of schools, and through grants for education support and training, all take account of the needs of small rural schools.

Reading Standards

29. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to monitor reading standards in the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: The national curriculum will secure, for the first time, national information about standards in reading from age seven onwards. Once it is fully in place, all pupils will be required by law to be assessed in reading at the ages of seven, 11, 14 and 16; and aggregate statistics will be published.

Nursery Provision, Kent

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science where in rank order of nursery provision in England and Wales, Kent county council education authority stands.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows that in January 1990, Kent local education authority appeared 89th out of the 96 local education authorities in England in regard to the percentage of under-fives attending maintained nursery school and nursery classes.

Similar data for Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Under Fives in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in rank order January 1990

		Percentage attending nursery classes and nursery schools
1	Hounslow[1]	66
2	South Tyneside	58
3	Wolverhampton	57
4	Walsall	56
5	North Tyneside	56
6	Cleveland	55
7	Manchester	54
8	Newham	54
9	Salford	53
10	Liverpool	50
11	Barnsley	50
12	Hillingdon	49
13	Nottinghamshire	48
14	Wakefield	48
15	Sheffield	44
16	Sandwell	44
17	Knowsley[1]	42
18	Leeds	41
19	Doncaster[1]	41
20	Tameside	40
21	Newcastle upon Tyne	40
22	Rotherham	40
23	Durham	40
24	Merton[1]	40
25	Haringey	38
26	Kirklees	38
27	Derbyshire	38
28	Bolton	37
29	Sunderland	36
30	Bradford	36
31	Inner London	35
32	Waltham Forest	35
33	Barking[1]	35
34	Ealing	35
35	Gateshead	35
36	Solihull[1]	35
37	Oldham[1]	34
38	Humberside	34
39	Dudley	34
40	St. Helens	33
41	Sefton	32
42	Birmingham	32
43	Brent	32
44	Kingston upon Thames	31
45	Bedfordshire	31
46	Rochdale	31
47	Sutton	31
48	Northumberland	30
49	Hertfordshire	30

		Percentage attending nursery classes and nursery schools
50	Bury	29
51	Barnet	29
52	Calderdale[1]	28
53	Wigan	25
54	Berkshire	25
55	Coventry	25
56	Wirral	24
57	Cumbria	23
58	Trafford[1]	22
59	Leicestershire	22
60	Staffordshire	22
61	Cheshire	21
62	North Yorkshire	21
63	Enfield[1]	20
64	Northamptonshire	20
65	Richmond upon Thames	19
66	Warwickshire	17
67	Stockport	17
68	Lancashire	17
69	Avon	17
70	Harrow[1]	16
71	Suffolk	16
72	Bexley	15
73	Oxfordshire	14
74	Cornwall[3]	14
75	Redbridge[1]	13
76	Shropshire	12
77	Devon	11
78	Cambridgeshire	11
79	Surrey	11
80	Buckinghamshire	10
81	Lincolnshire	9
82	East Sussex	8
83	Hereford and Worcester[1]	7
84	Croydon	7
85	Isle of Wight[1]	7
86	Essex	6
87	Dorset[1]	6
88	Norfolk	6
89	Kent	5
90	Hampshire	5
91	Havering[1]	4
92	West Sussex	4
93	Wiltshire[1]	3
94	Bromley[1]	2
95	Somerset[1]	1
96	Gloucestershire[2]	0
	England	25

Note:
[1] Have no Nursery schools.
[2] Have no Nursery schools or Nursery classes.
[3] Includes Isles of Scilly.

Nurseries

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of three and four-year-olds in Kent county council education authority area have places in *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* nursery classes and *(c)* infant classes.

Mr. Eggar: The percentage of children under five attending maintained nursery schools, nursery classes and infant classes in primary schools in Kent local education authority in January 1990 was as follows:

	Percentage of Under Fives[1]
Nursery schools	0·2
Nursery classes	4·8
Infant classes	12·3

[1] The number of under fives as a percentage of the estimated population aged 3 and 4.

Nuclear Structure Facility, Daresbury

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the number of postgraduate students attached to the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Alan Howarth: There are 33 postgraduate students who spend part of their time at the nuclear structure facility at the SERC's Daresbury laboratory.

Research, Bristol

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many research contracts and agreements the United States Department of Defence currently has with Bristol universities and polytechnics; what is their total value, and if his Department has any involvement in the placing of those research contracts and agreements.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Such information is not collected centrally. The Department is not involved in these institutional matters.

Higher Education Fees

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to issue a directive prohibiting colleges of higher education from imposing top-up fees.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The setting of fees for degree and other courses is properly a matter for individual higher education institutions. Primary legislation, for which the Government have no plans, would be required to change this. Equally, the Government have no plans to change the arrangements whereby standard fees are met in full for students eligible for an award under the awards arrangements.

Nuclear Research

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to negotiate a higher basic country contribution to the European nuclear research centre.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The United Kingdom, in conjunction with other members, will continue to encourage CERN to increase the proportion of its budget financed from sources outside the member state contribution system. This could include further assistance, either in cash or in kind, from the two host states.

London Institute

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to ensure himself that the criteria used by the London institute for allocating money from the access fund is within the guidelines laid down by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The conditions of payment of access funds set by my right hon. and learned Friend already require institutions to follow guidelines set by the funding councils. All institutions have been asked to account for their expenditure of access fund grant at the end of the academic year.

History and Geography

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the teaching of history and geography and the attainment targets stipulated in the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The representations received in response to the proposals of the then Secretary of State for attainment targets and programmes of study in geography and history were the subject of consultation reports published recently by the National Curriculum Council. On 14 January my right hon. and learned Friend published draft statutory orders and draft associated documents containing attainment targets and programmes of study in these two subjects, and invited comments and representations by 15 February.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the teaching of history in schools is to be pursued with the intention of understanding contemporary issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by right hon. and learned Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on 14 January 1991 at column *373-74* when he published a draft order and associated document setting out attainment targets and programmes of study for history in the national curriculum.

Advisory Board for the Research Councils

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on ABRC's flexibility margin for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The science budget for 1991-92 has been fully allocated. In its recent advice to my right hon. and learned Friend, the Advisory Board for the Research Councils recommended that sums of £39 million and £60 million, respectively, should remain unallocated in 1992-93 and 1993-94. He expects to receive further advice from the ABRC on the allocation of these sums in the spring.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all local education authorities in England in rank order of expenditure per secondary pupil per year, starting with the higher spending authority, together with their position in the table of examination results for school leavers achieving grades A-C at GCSE in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Fallon *[pursuant to his reply 8 February 1991, columns. 257-60]:* It appears that some of the information supplied was not published fully in the *Official Report.*

The correct answer should read as follows:

The following table gives the net institutional expenditure per secondary school pupil in the financial year 1988-89, and averaged examination results for three years 1986-87 to 1988-89. The purpose of averaging is to reduce sampling error within the derived percentages. Comparable information is not yet available for 1989-90.

LEA	[12] *Net Institutional expenditure per pupil 1988-89* £	*Proportion of leavers with 5 or more GCSE results at Grades A-C*[3] *as percentage of all leavers*	*rank*
ILEA	2,505	15·9	91
Waltham Forest	2,435	12·7	94
Brent	2,305	20·6	78
Ealing	2,145	22·5	67
Newham	2,140	14·9	93
Croydon	2,040	22·1	70
Knowsley	1,990	8·5	96
Barking	1,970	11·3	95
Coventry	1,940	21·2	76
Liverpool	1,905	19·4	84
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,900	32·2	10
Hounslow	1,895	25·2	49
Sandwell	1,885	15·5	92
Walsall	1,885	23·4	59
Hillingdon	1,870	22·7	65
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,870	21·6	74
Havering	1,860	24·4	57
Salford	1,860	23·2	62
Wigan	1,845	30·2	18
Dudley	1,840	25·5	47
South Tyneside	1,825	22·2	68
Barnet	1,820	38·9	2
Sheffield	1,810	22·2	68
North Tyneside	1,780	27·5	36
Bromley	1,770	29·9	19
Gateshead	1,770	20·4	80
Cleveland	1,770	26·5	43
Leicestershire	1,770	25·1	51
Wirral	1,755	27·8	31
Derbyshire	1,755	24·6	54
Wolverhampton	1,745	19·9	81
Hertfordshire	1,745	31·9	11
Nottinghamshire	1,745	23·4	59

LEA	[12] Net Institutional expenditure per pupil 1988-89 £	Proportion of leavers with 5 or more GCSE results at Grades A-C[3] as percentage of all leavers	rank
Harrow	1,740	38·6	3
Redbridge	1,735	25·5	47
Bury	1,730	27·7	33
Stockport	1,730	28·6	25
Enfield	1,715	26·9	41
Buckinghamshire	1,715	36·0	5
St. Helens	1,710	20·5	79
Trafford	1,710	30·7	15
Rochdale	1,700	20·9	77
Shropshire	1,695	30·3	17
Humberside	1,690	22·6	66
Bexley	1,685	28·5	26
Cumbria	1,685	28·0	29
Calderdale	1,665	21·5	75
Sunderland	1,665	21·8	72
Oxfordshire	1,665	27·7	33
Merton	1,660	24·6	54
Tameside	1,660	27·1	39
Doncaster	1,655	21·7	73
Solihull	1,650	31·7	12
Barnsley	1,645	19·7	82
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,640	32·4	8
Birmingham	1,640	19·1	85
Bolton	1,635	28·7	24
Rotherham	1,635	23·0	63
Bedfordshire	1,635	24·9	52
Essex	1,635	27·4	37
Surrey	1,635	38·0	4
Warwickshire	1,635	28·5	26
Sutton	1,630	39·1	1
Avon	1,630	27·8	31
Northumberland	1,630	30·7	15
Kirklees	1,620	25·6	46
Lancashire	1,620	26·8	42
Staffordshire	1,610	24·9	52
Bradford	1,605	16·9	88
Sefton	1,600	28·5	26
North Yorkshire	1,595	34·5	7
Oldham	1,590	18·1	86
Norfolk	1,585	24·5	56
Hampshire	1,580	29·6	21
Durham	1,575	23·4	59
Berkshire	1,570	32·3	9
Somerset	1,570	27·1	39
East Sussex	1,565	31·4	13
Wiltshire	1,555	25·9	45
Leeds	1,545	22·0	71
Cheshire	1,545	29·1	23
Gloucestershire	1,545	31·2	14
Northamptonshire	1,545	22·8	64
Devon	1,535	26·3	44
West Sussex	1,530	35·5	6
Cornwall	1,525	29·9	19
Isle of Wight	1,495	19·5	83
Dorset	1,485	27·6	35
Suffolk	1,485	24·2	58
Cambridgeshire	1,480	28·0	29
Kent	1,475	27·3	38
Lincolnshire	1,475	25·2	49
Hereford and Worcester	1,440	29·2	22
Haringey	n/a	16·6	89
Manchester	n/a	16·4	90
Wakefield	n/a	17·5	87

Notes to table:

1. Net institutional expenditure includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises, and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

2. The expenditure figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DOE and pupil number returns to DES. N/A denotes that an expenditure return has not been received from an LEA.

3. The examination data are aggregated from the results of a sample survey for the academic years 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89. The survey is based on a 10 per cent. sample of pupils in maintained and independent schools (excluding special schools) who have reached the minimum

school leaving age. The percentages quoted do not reflect the achievements of pupils at O-level, CSE or GCSE after leaving school; nor their attainments in examinations leading to vocational or other qualifications at school or elsewhere. The data includes grades A-C at O-level and CSE grade 1.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Overseas Visits

Mr. Amos: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the airline used, and the destination of each of the overseas visits undertaken by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee for the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Overseas visits undertaken by the Home Affairs Committee in the last 12 months and the airlines used are as follows:

Date	*Destination*	*Itinerary*	*Airlines used*
14-17 May 1990	Brussels, Bonn, Paris	London-Brussels	British Airways
		Brussels-Cologne	No airline used
		Cologne-Paris	Lufthansa
		Paris-London	British Airways
10-14 June 1990	Lisbon, Madrid, Lyons	London-Lisbon	British Airways
		Lisbon-Madrid	Iberia
		Madrid-Lyons	Air France
		Lyons-London	British Airways
21 June 1990	Calais		No airline used
19-22 November 1990	Utrecht, Milan, Rome	London-Amsterdam	British Airways; 3 Members with northern constituencies flew respectively with Aer Lingus, Air UK, British Midlands
		Amsterdam-Milan	KLM
		Milan-Rome	Alitalia
		Rome-London	Alitalia

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Director of Finance and Administration

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the process whereby the advertisement for a Director of Finance and Administration for the House of Commons, placed in *The Economist* of 26 January, was drafted.

Mr. Beith: Advertisements for the new post of Director of Finance and Administration were placed in the national media in late January by Korn/Ferry International, acting on the instructions of the implementation manager appointed by the House of Commons Commission.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Management Consultancies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each of the management consultancies operating in his Department, the title of the project, the finishing date and the cost *(a)* currently and *(b)* in 1990 and excluding any in *(a)*.

Mr. Jack: Details of current studies and those undertaken since April 1990 are in the tables. The cost of individual studies is not given, as that could breach commercial confidentiality, but total expenditure on these studies in the financial year 1990-91 to date is £2·94 million.

Current consultancies

Consultancy firm	*Project*
Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge	Headquarters relocation project
Admiral Management Services Limited	Quality management systems
Andersen Consulting	Training project
Andersen Consulting	Contributions unit development
Arthur D. Allwright Associates	Purchasing consultancy
Baddeley Associates Limited	Communicating the operational strategy
Baddeley Associates Limited	Code and instruction review
Baddeley Associates Limited	Headquarters review team—consultancy support
Cavendish Tricorne	Corporate efficiency
Cavendish Tricorne	Local factors model
Cavendish Tricorne	Information technology services agency manpower model
Cavendish Tricorne	War pensions
Cavendish Tricorne	Local pay additions
Cavendish Tricorne	Performance related pay
Christine Gratton	Women in management courses
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte	Creation of the purchasing and supply manual

Consultancy firm	Project
DPS Consultancy Limited	Retirement counselling courses
Dun & Bradstreet International	Purchasing consultancy
Equalities Associates	Equal opportunities seminars
Ernst and Young	Integrated complementing system (development)
Ernst and Young	Departmental information systems strategy scoping study (headquarters units)
Hadley Hunter	Overpayments recovery
Lloyd Northover	Corporate image for Department of Social Services property
Meena Goyal	Housing and community charge
Meena Goyal	Benefits project work
Mick Tyler	Integrated complementing system
Mr. John Mesher	Statement on the principles of trusteeship
PA Consultancy Group	Enhancement of the MMD—BMD database (Nottingham staff resource unit)
PA Consulting Group	Management reviews
PA Consulting Group	Review of the Department of Social Services central office management
PA Consulting Group	Human resource needs
Peat Marwick McLintock	Counselling for staff leaving under the voluntary redundancy scheme
Peat Marwick McLintock	Selection and recruitment of the benefit agency's training manager
Perspective Technica	Quality management systems
Price Waterhouse	Contributions unit development (human resources personnel strategy project)
Price Waterhouse	Administrative resource management system unit costs and budgeting
Projecteam	Headquarters relocation project
Property Holdings	Headquarters relocation project
Public Arts	Headquarters relocation project
Redhouse Lane	Headquarters relocation project
SERCO Limited	Purchasing consultancy
Symonds Facilities Management plc	Headquarters relocation project
TOP–IX Limited	Administrative resource management system work measurement pilot exercise, keywork library
The Harry Mitchell College	Administrative resource management system work measurement pilot exercise
Touche Ross	Benefits agency implementation work (MIS and finance)
Touche Ross	Contributions unit development (FIS and MIS)
Touche Ross	Performance indicators for resettlement units
University College London	Psychologist for the forms design unit
Warwick University	National Insurance contributions yield

Other consultancies in 1990-91

Consultancy firm	Project	Finishing date
Anita Ram	Selected International Comparisons of Household Incomes	October 1990
Baddeley Associates Limited	Director of Social Security Operations (Change Management Project—Managers Charter)	April 1990
Ben Williams Consultants	Customer Service Training	November 1990
British Standards Institute	Corporate Image for DSS Property	May 1990
CAS Marketing Services	Purchasing Consultancy (Engagement Purchasing Director)	April 1990
Cavendish Tricorne	Contributions Unit Development (Human Resource Planning)	September 1990
Cavendish Tricorne	Overbearing Model	October 1990
Cavendish Tricorne	Integrated Pay and Personnel Project	October 1990
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency	Departmental Information Systems Strategy Scoping Study	June 1990
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency	Financial Information Strategy Project (Annual Review)	October 1990
Civil Service College	Director of Social Security Operations	April 1990
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte	Agencies Systems Planning	August 1990
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte	Agencies Systems Planning (Training Seminar for Leaders)	May 1990
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte	HQ Relocation Project	November 1990

Consultancy firm	*Project*	*Finishing date*
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte	Procurement Management Information System	December 1990
Enator	Performance Integrated Monitoring for Managers System	April 1990
Enator	Integrated Complementing System	June 1990
Enator	OPSTRAT Project	October 1990
Enator	Integrated Monitoring System	December 1990
Ernst and Young	Integrated Complementing System	May 1990
Ernst and Young	Departmental Information Systems Strategy DISSC Impact Analysis	October 1990
Ernst and Young	Self Investment by Pensions Schemes	September 1990
Hadley Hunter	Lone Parenthood Study	July 1990
Handley Walker	Post Office Counters—Fee Negotiations	April 1990
Handley Walker	Post Office Counters—Fee Negotiations (Stage 2)	October 1990
Handley Walker	Purchasing of Welfare Milk	November 1990
Logica UK Limited	Integrated Complementing System (Integrated Monitoring System)	November 1990
London Economics	Self Investment by Pensions Schemes	June 1990
Market and Opinion Research International	Headquarters Relocation Project	August 1990
Mass Observation	Relocation Assessment	April 1990
Nationwide Anglia Relocation	HQ Relocation Project	October 1990
Nigel Parry	HQ Relocation Project	September 1990
Office for Public Management Ltd (King's Fund College)	Director of Social Security Operations	April 1990
P–E Inbucon	Survey of Local Authorities (Community Charge Benefit Monitoring Exercise)	August 1990
PA Consulting Group	Rewards Strategy	October 1990
PA Consulting Group	Director of Social Security Operations—Change Management (Rewards Strategy)	April 1990
Price Waterhouse	Integrated Complementing System	April 1990
Price Waterhouse	Integrated Complementing System (Development)	June 1990
Price Waterhouse	Research into Costs in Residential Care and Nursing Homes	September 1990
Price Waterhouse	Benefits Agency Finance Director (Selection and Recruitment of)	November 1990
Price Waterhouse	Training Requirements	November 1990
Price Waterhouse	Executive Information Systems Feasibility Study	January 1991
Professor Steven Haberman	Self Investment by Pensions Schemes	July 1990
Sema Group	Social Fund Support	June 1990
Touche Ross	Administrative Resource Management System (Complementing)	October 1990
Touche Ross	Integrated Complementing System (Maintenance)	May 1990
Touche Ross	Lone Parenthood Study	July 1990
Touche Ross	War Pensions	October 1990
Touche Ross	Asset Management	November 1990
Whitegates Estate	Headquarters Relocation Project	October 1990

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the numbers of people who would be eligible for the disability working allowance if the capital limit was set at *(a)* £16,000 and *(b)* £8,000 broken down in each case by whether tariff income is taken into account for capital over (i) £8,000, (ii) £5,000 and (iii) £3,000.

Mr. Scott: We have estimated that about 50,000 people will be entitled to disability working allowance at any one time. The intention is that there should be taken into account at a rate of £1 for each £250 of capital above £3,000. However, given the small numbers involved and the uncertainty about the characteristics of this group it is not possible to estimate with confidence how this estimate would be affected if a different capital rule was applied.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of the total numbers of people who would be eligible for the disability allowance if the taper was set at *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 40 per cent. or *(c)* 30 per cent.;

(2) what would be the additional net cost to the Department of reducing the taper applied in the disability working allowance from the illustrative rate of 70 per cent. to *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 40 per cent. and *(c)* 30 per cent. broken down by (i) gross cost and (ii) offsetting savings in income-related benefits.

Mr. Scott: The effects of applying different tapers in disability working allowance cannot be predicted with confidence since the estimates include assumptions about behaviour changes and likely earnings levels among potential claimants who are not currently in work. Our best estimates are as follows:

	Gross cost £ million	*Net cost[1] £ million*	*Caseload*
(a) *50 per cent. taper*	30	20	65,000
(b) *40 per cent. taper*	50	30	75,000
(c) *30 per cent. taper*	80	50	90,000

[1] This is the cost after deducting the savings in other benefits. These include savings from people moving off incapacity benefits and savings on income-related benefits which may be payable in addition to DWA.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of raising the capital limit for the purposes of the disability working allowance from £8,000 to £16,000.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 10 December 1990 at col. *303-4*.

Benefits, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest figures for the Doncaster area as to how many people are receiving *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* housing benefit; and what percentage of the Doncaster adult population this represents.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information is as follows:

	Number
Income support[1]	31,991
Family credit[2]	1,977
Housing benefit[3]	22,937

Notes:
[1] Data derived from 30 November 1990 count of cases in action, which include a number of cases where payment has ceased but other action is continuing.
[2] Number of families who, at the time their award was made, were living in the Doncaster area. Data does not include family credit awards made after 28 December 1990.
[3] Total number of people in receipt of housing benefit in the Doncaster borough council area in November 1990. The borough council boundary is not conterminous with the boundary of the area covered by the Department's local offices in Doncaster and Wath-on-Dearne.

Data are not available on the total adult population in Doncaster on the dates and for the precise geographical areas to which the above information relates.

Computerisation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the frequency and nature of errors on the computer system used to calculate benefits at his Department's offices in the Doncaster area; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's strategy for the computerisation of the social security payment system, which includes local offices in the Doncaster area, will be completed on time in July 1991. One of the aims of the strategy is to reduce the level of payment errors. Although information on specific types of errors are not currently available either locally or nationally, the majority relate to human error, rather than computer faults. The latest available information indicates that the national error rate for all types of income support payments stands at around 5·3 per cent. compared with 7·4 per cent. prior to computerisation. The error rate for payments of retirement pension averages 2 per cent.

Local Offices

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the posts, grade and functions of existing vacancies in each of his Department's offices in Nottingham.

Miss Widdecombe: On 28 January 1991, the four former offices in Nottingham located in Shakespeare street, David lane, Station street and Castle gate were restructured into two administrative units, namely West Nottinghamshire and East Nottinghamshire districts. There are no vacancies at the present time in either district.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to review the division between benefits which are paid for out of the national insurance fund and those which are paid for out of taxation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Social Security Act 1990 made certain changes in the division between benefits which are paid for out of the national insurance fund and those which are paid for out of taxation. We have no current plans to review the division further.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland were receiving rate rebate/community charge benefit in 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* The figures for 1988-89, 1989-90 and the latest estimates, based on benefit caseload processed at 31 August 1990, for 1990-91 are in the table. The 1990-91 figures are likely to underestimate the current position, because some authorities still had a number of unprocessed claims at that time. The information requested for 1987-88 is not available.

thousands

	England and Wales	*Scotland*
Rate Rebates 1988-89	5,840	840
Rate Rebates and Community Charge Rebates in Scotland 1989-90	5,700	1,100
Community Charge Benefit 1990-91	7,940	970

Cold Weather Payments

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the dates on which, at *(a)* Glasgow airport and *(b)* Edinburgh airport, the average mean daily temperature for seven consecutive days was equal to or below 0 deg Celsius, and thus triggered cold weather payments in the Glasgow-Strathclyde area and the Edinburgh area, respectively.

Mr. Scott: Edinburgh airport weather station has not triggered this winter, as at 5 February 1991.

Glasgow airport weather station has triggered twice. The average mean daily temperature for the week ending 16 January 1991 was −0·2 deg C and for the seven days preceding 4 February the temperature was −0·1 deg C.

Full details of average mean daily temperatures recorded at all the weather stations can be found in the Library.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer of 7 February on cold weather payments arrangements, what is the estimated extra cost of the amendments to the scheme per week; and for how long the revised arrangements will endure;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 7 February on cold weather payments, whether claimants will receive payments earlier under his revised scheme;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 7 February on cold weather payments arrangements, whether arising from the waiving of the seven-day qualifying rule claimants will be paid for part weeks and single days.

Mr. Scott: As my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister said today, given the continuation of the widespread and exceptional severe weather, we are again waiving the seven-day qualifying period this week. As at last Thursday, the coming Thursday 14 February will be deemed to be the trigger day for all areas of the country which have not already triggered; and people in the appropriate group will be eligible for payment, at the new enhanced rate of £6, for the current seven days just as they will for the seven days up to last Thursday. We shall continue to monitor the situation carefully, and if the cold weather should continue to the same degree we shall take similar measures.

It will not be possible to give the cost of the changes to the scheme until it is known how many people have claimed. Claimants will, as before, receive payment as soon as possible after making a successful claim. All payments will relate to a seven-day period.

Income Support

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of people in receipt of mortgage interest payments under income support and who have had that payment stopped under the 52-week limit for those in hospital; how many of these people then returned home; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Widows' Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances a person's entitlement to a retirement pension or widow's benefit will be enhanced or reduced by the provisions of the Social Security (Widows Benefit and Retirement Pensions) Amendment Regulations 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: The regulations neither enhance nor reduce entitlement to retirement pension or widows benefit. They are essentially technical in nature and set out more clearly than the original regulations the entitlement conditions for reduced rate benefit where the contribution conditions are not fully satisfied.

Severely Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated number of severely disabled people in employment, or self-employment, who require nursing or personal care to enable them to continue to work; what is the average number of hours of care required by each such person per week; and if he will give the average cost of such care.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

National Insurance Credits

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when his Department's office in Newcastle expects to give a ruling regarding national insurance credits in respect of Mr. M. J. D. of Birmingham, whose national insurance number is LT079153B; and if he will make a statement about the length of time taken to resolve this matter.

Mr. Jack: Resolution of this matter involved consultation between this Department and the Employment Services Agency. This has taken longer than expected but has now been concluded. We expect to be able to write to Mr. M. J. D. of Birmingham within the next week to confirm his credit position. Investigations are in hand to examine thoroughly the reasons for the delays in this case and I will write to the hon. Member about this.

SCOTLAND

Industrial Investment Fund

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what EC prohibitions exist with regard to the establishment of a Government funded Scottish industrial investment fund able to provide security-free loans, capital repayment holidays, lower than market rate interest rates, and special support for training.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Any proposal to establish a Government-funded organisation providing state aid to industry would require to comply with the provisions of articles 92 and 93 of the treaty of Rome, including the provisions in those articles relating to notification to, and approval by, the European Commission.

Salmon

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the recent scale of farmed salmon exports from Norway to the European Community and on its impact on the Scottish fish farming industry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is understood that Norway exported 72,000 tonnes of farmed salmon to the European Community in 1990. Production of Scottish farmed salmon in 1990 was 32,350 tonnes. I recognise the Scottish industry's concern at the current state of the market and the effect of Norwegian imports on it. The Norwegian Government have recently given renewed assurances of efforts by their industry to stabilise the market and on that basis the European Commission has proposed to close without remedy the anti-dumping case brought by Scottish and Irish producers. The Government are considering this proposal.

Soft Fruit Growers

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he proposes to protect Scottish soft fruit growers from subsidised east European imports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: East European imports of semi-processed soft fruit have been the subject of continuing representations to the European Commission since the collapse of the informal price agreements with Poland and Yugoslavia last year. The Government took the lead in ensuring that the Commission reacted to market disruption by introducing safeguard action in the form of minimum import prices in July 1990. These prices were originally intended to last until 31 December. They have, however, been extended to 31 March 1991 as the Commission was unable to meet its commitment to negotiate new price agreements on the basis of the undertaking given when substantial concessions were given by the Community on the extension of the generalised system of preferences to certain East European countries.

The Government have also made clear their view that, if satisfactory price agreements are still not negotiated before the expiry of the current arrangements, provision should be made for the safeguard action to continue for at least nine months to allow adequate cover during the 1991 marketing season.

Community Charge

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing by region the number of £50 civil penalties imposed on persons failing to return poll tax registration forms; and if he will consider simplification of such forms and consider allowing local editions as in England.

Mr. Lang: Information on the number of civil penalties imposed for failure to return registration forms is not held centrally. We will be looking at the registration arrangements as part of our review of the community charge and this exercise will include a review of the forms if it is decided to retain existing procedures. Meanwhile there is no intention of moving away from the present arrangement in Scotland, whereby the format of the registration form is prescribed. There is, of course, nothing to prevent community charges registration officers inserting additional explanatory information along with the forms that are issued.

Mental Illness

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of patients receiving treatment for mental illness in Scottish hospitals in 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information for 1990 is not yet available. The total number of patients who were resident in mental illness and psychiatric units at 31 December 1989 was 13,599. The number of in-patient discharges in 1989 was 29,576. For the year ended 31 March 1990 Scottish hospitals dealt with 3,651 day case attendances as well as treating 36,448 new out-patients.

A1

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the locations and duration of temporary traffic light controls on the Scottish section of the A1 trunk road during the last year, giving the reason for each case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Temporary traffic light controls on the A1 in Scotland (approximately 90 m long) during 1990 were as follows:

Location	*Duration*	*Description of work*
Lothian		
A1/A6137 (Vert) Crossroads Haddington	5 weeks January/Feburary (excluding Sundays)	Advance ducting and services contract (Haddington Bypass Works)
Haldane Avenue/Hospital Road Junction Haddington	4 Weeks March/April	Junction Improvement Works (Haddington Bypass Works)
A1/A6137 (Vert) Roundabout on Haddington Bypass	4 months April/August	Construction of new roundabout (Haddington Bypass Works)
Haddington Bypass (East End) to Junction B1347 North Berwick Road	5 weeks November/December (excluding weekends)	Road patching
Haddington to East Linton	6½ weeks April/May (excluding weekends)	Road patching
Haddington to East Linton	6 months June/December (intermittent, maximum 2 locations)	Gas main installation
Beltonford Bridge	6 weeks November/December	Road resurfacing
Tynefield/Beltonford/Dunbar Bypass	6 weeks January/February	Road patching
Lawfield/Thorntonloch Phases 1 & 2	2 weeks March/April	Road resurfacing
Bilsdean Bypass	2 weeks November (excluding weekends)	Road patching
Dunglass	3 weeks November/December	Road patching
Borders		
Cockburnspath	1 week January	General road maintenance
	2 days March	General road maintenance
	3 weeks June	Road reconstruction
	2 weeks October	General road maintenance
Tower-farm to Cockburnspath	Continuing, started November	Road reconstruction
Tower Bridge	2½ weeks May/June	Reconstruction
Penmanshiel	1 day August	Road patching

Location	Duration	Description of work
Harelawside	2 weeks June/July	Road reconstruction
Grantshouse	1 day February	Road edge repair
Renton to Greenwood	11 weeks March/May	Construction of metre strips
	6 weeks November/December	Construction of metre strips
Renton	1 week December	Earthworks for British Rail
Houndwood	2 weeks January	Road reconstruction
	3 days April	Road edge repair
	1 day June	Road patching
	3 weeks October	Construction of metre strip
Howburn	2 days December	British Rail works
Heugh Head	2½ weeks January/February	Road reconstruction
Reston to Swinewoodmill	13 weeks March/June	Construction of metre strips
Reston	2 days January	Road drainage repairs
	½ day August	Installation of traffic counters
	2 days December	Road edge repairs
Burnmouth	2 days April	Road patching/resurfacing
	1 day May	Road drainage repairs
	2 days September	Road patching
Lamberton/Burnmouth	3 days June	Road patching
Lamberton	½ day February	Installation of traffic counters
	2 days May	Road patching
	1 day November	Installation of traffic counters

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many exceptionally large or heavy loads, requiring notification or escort by the police or local authority, were conveyed on the Scottish section of the A1 trunk road in each of the last 12 months.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the differing types of exceptionally wide or heavy loads moving annually on the Scottish road network is not held on a centralised data base. Police and bridge authorities are notified in respect of their individual interest. There are many thousands of such notifications per annum on the road network and records for the A1 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Lothian and Borders police however estimate that the number of exceptional loads on the A1 requiring accompaniment are in the region of 200 per annum.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the road juctions with the A1 trunk road in Scotland which are being considered for safety improvement measures.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The first interim report of the A1 steering group has identified measures which could be taken at Coveyheugh junction, Greenwood junction, Knowes Farm Road junction, Huntington Road junction and at Gladsmuir.

The Scottish Office Environment Department is discussing these measures with Borders and Lothian regional councils, my agents for maintaining the A1 trunk road in Scotland, with a view to the early implementation. The measures proposed involve the improvement of signing and road markings.

Age Concern

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department issues any guidelines to social work departments about consulting committees and local communities before deciding to close local Age Concern organisations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have not issued any guidance since decisions on the support of local projects are for authorities themselves to determine.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the amount of central Government support given to Govan Age Concern since its inception.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Central Government grants under the urban programme totalling £183,274 have been paid to Strathclyde regional council in respect of approved expenditure by the Govan Age Concern project since its inception.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department was informed of, or consulted about, the intended closure of Govan Age Concern.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has ever received and evaluated reports on the work, objectives and achievements of Govan Age Concern.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Yes.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of Alzheimers' Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of Alzheimers' Scotland and has not received any request for a meeting.

Health Clinic, Johnstone

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the proposed commencement, termination and opening dates for the new health clinic at Ludovic square, Johnstone; and what range of services will be provided at the clinic.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Work started on site on 14 January 1991 and building work is expected to be completed by the spring of next year. Commissioning of the building will take some six to eight weeks thereafter and I anticipate that the new clinic will therefore be opened in summer 1992.

It is planned to provide the services currently offered in the existing accommodation including chiropody, dental

and mothercraft but these may be augmented as the result of an update of a user survey to be carried out prior to the opening of the new centre.

Accommodation for one local GP will be provided and evening clinics may be introduced to meet local needs.

Sports and Recreation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps urgently to collect information regarding the number of playfields, stadia and recreation grounds in Scotland *(a)* available to schools and *(b)* available to the public in general.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am aware that the Secretary of State for Education and Science plans to make available to the Sports Council (Great Britain) in 1991-92 additional resources to enable the council, the Central Council of Physical Recreation and the National Playing Fields Association to set up a register of recreational land in England. I have advised the director of the National Playing Fields Association that if this register proves to be worthwhile in England, the Government will consider whether a similar register should be created in Scotland.

Paisley Town Centre

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the planning proposal currently before him for the pedestrianisation of Paisley town centre; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Paisley town centre steering group has inquired when a decision would be made on my right hon. Friend's consent to the making of this order and my hon. Friend, the Minister for Industry and Local Government discussed the matter with the hon. Member and the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams). Explanation of the reasons for rejecting the objections lodged against the scheme have been sought from Strathclyde regional council. Subject to the provision of satisfactory explanation there is no reason why prompt progress should not be made with the consideration of the order.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding has been allocated to the Scottish Council for Independent Schools for an advertising campaign to advise parents of the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None. The recent advertising campaign to promote awareness of the assisted places scheme was funded directly by the Scottish Office.

Milk Production

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farms produce milk and how many of these farms produce less than 200,000 litres per annum.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In June 1990 there were 3,143 farm units in Scotland producing milk and 2,665 registered producers. Approximately 700 producers hold a quota of less than 200,000 litres.

Imported Waste

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what proportion of waste incinerated within Scotland is imported; and what are projected levels of such importation for the next decade;

(2) in what quantities per nation annually European toxic waste has been imported by Scotland for each year since 1979;

(3) what quantity of waste, in the last year for which figures are available, was imported for direct landfill within Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Very little, if any, of the waste incinerated in Scotland is imported. On the basis of current information it seems unlikely that this will change significantly in the next decade.

Imports from Europe of hazardous waste, as defined in the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988, were 453 tonnes in 1988 and 480 tonnes in 1989. Virtually all of this waste was imported from Eire for recycling. There have been no reports of hazardous waste under the regulations being imported for direct landfill.

Forestry

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of planting undertaken by the private sector and supported by the woodland grant scheme in 1990 and for each conservancy, indicating in each case the proportion of broadleaves and conifer.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The areas of new planting grant-aided under the woodland grant scheme in the year ended 31 March 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, were as follows:

Conservancy	*Conifers hectares*	*Broadleaves hectares*	*Total hectares*
North England	155	242	397
East England	31	339	370
West England	75	357	432
Wales	147	120	267
North Scotland	2,515	906	3,421
Mid Scotland	1,202	288	1,490
South Scotland	1,771	237	2,008
Great Britain	5,896	2,489	8,385

These figures do not include new planting grant-aided under other Forestry Commission schemes or the farm woodland scheme.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the total amount of planting undertaken by the Forestry Commission in 1990 in each conservancy and *(b)* the respective amounts of broadleaf and conifer.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The areas of new planting undertaken by the Forestry Commission in the year ended 31 March 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, were as follows:

Conservancy	*Conifers hectares*	*Broadleaves hectares*	*Total hectares*
North England	170	25	195
East England	Nil	Nil	Nil
West England	1	2	3

Conservancy	Conifers hectares	Broadleaves hectares	Total hectares
Wales	86	10	96
North Scotland	1,749	99	1,848
Mid Scotland	900	66	966
South Scotland	914	59	973
Great Britain	3,820	261	4,081

Smoked Salmon

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the provisions which apply to the posting of smoked salmon *(a)* in Scotland to European destinations and *(b)* from Europe to destinations in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* Mail for European destinations is accepted provided that it is appropriately packed with a completed customs declaration form and is in compliance with any restrictions and prohibitions which are in force in the relevant country. Incoming packages from European countries would, of course, be subject to the postal requirements of the country of origin and would need to have a satisfactory customs declaration.

Housing

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the gross domestic fixed capital formation in dwellings in Scotland in constant terms in each year since 1970.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* The table gives gross domestic fixed capital formation in dwellings in Scotland in current prices from 1971, the earliest year for which estimates are available on a consistent basis, until 1988.

Constant price figures are not available as separate price deflators are not available for Scotland.

Gross domestic fixed capital formation in dwellings in Scotland[1]

	£ million
1971	201
1972	206
1973	247
1974	368
1975	451
1976	525
1977	458
1978	565
1979	684
1980	704
1981	708
1982	792
1983	883
1984	984
1985	997
1986	1,124
1987	1,217
1988	1,333

Source: Central Statistical Office

[1] Estimates from 1971-79 are not strictly comparable with estimates for later years.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the Government's allocation to local authorities for expenditure on improvement grants for private sector housing in real terms in each year since 1978-79.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* We do not issue capital allocations to local authorities specifically for expenditure on housing improvement grants. It is for each local authority to determine, from within its overall non-HRA capital allocation for assistance to the private housing sector, the level of resources it wishes to utilise for meeting such grants in the light of other competing demands for resources. Gross non-HRA capital allocations issued to local authorities since 1978-79 and incorporating any supplementary allocations made during the year, are set out in the table, expressed in 1990-91 prices.

Scotland: Non-HRA gross capital allocations (1990-91 prices)

	Mainstream non-HRA allocations (£ million)	Earmarked resources for Glasgow and Edinburgh repair grant backlogs (£ million)	Total (£ million)
1978-79	126·3	—	126·3
1979-80	105·3	—	105·3
1980-81	117·8	—	117·8
1981-82	132·1	—	132·1
1982-83	159·9	—	159·9
1983-84	141·4	—	[1]141·4
1984-85	228·2	—	228·2
1985-86	154·4	—	154·4
1986-87	155·9	—	155·9
1987-88	117·1	71·5	188·6
1988-89	122·2	60·4	182·6
1989-90	122·5	52·1	174·6
1990-91	107·4	22·3	129·7
1991-92[2]	91·9	7·8	99·7

[1] Special arrangements applied in 1983-84 when authorities were allowed to exceed consent subject to certain conditions.

[2] Provisional.

EMPLOYMENT

Disablement Resettlement Officers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria are used to measure the performance of disablement resettlement officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Employment and Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment show many responses he has received from Scotland to his White Paper on employment and disability.

Mr. Jackson: We have received 45 responses to my consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" from organisations and individuals in Scotland.

Horticultural Therapy

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met representatives of Horticultural Therapy to discuss its role in the development of training and employment for people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I have never met representatives from Horticultural Therapy. I understand that Horticultural Therapy is an organisation which assists people, including people with physical disabilities, mental handicaps and mental illness, to gain therapeutic benefit from horticulture. Therapeutic rehabilitation could be a factor in improving the chances of people with disabilities being able to gain and retain employment and develop in it. My Department provides considerable assistance to people with disabilities through training, rehabilitation and employment schemes and services to help them realise their full potential in work, including some support through horticultural work.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to provide financial support to Horticultural Therapy to enable it to develop therapeutic, leisure, training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities and mental health problems throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that Horticultural Therapy currently receives grants from the Department of Health and the Home Office. It would be a matter for Horticultural Therapy to consider whether it wished to put appropriate proposals for which it is seeking financial support to relevant Government Departments for consideration, including to local officials in the Employment Service or to training and enterprise councils or local enterprise companies.

Disabled People (Quota System)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to review the quota system for the employment of people with disabilities to assist people who are eligible to register but who do not wish to register.

Mr. Jackson: In our consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" the operation of the quota scheme was discussed and comments were invited on its merits and demerits. We are presently considering the response to the consultations.

Quarterly Attenders

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who determines the criteria for quarterly attender status; how they are set and under what provisions; and what is the number of claimants with quarterly attender status in each available year.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Special Needs Training

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines have been issued by his Department to training and enterprise councils concerning special needs training; and whether he has set any specific targets for the numbers of special needs trainees.

Mr. Jackson: My Department issued guidelines to training and enterprise councils in the publication "Developing a Special Training Needs Strategy—A Guide for TECs". Further sources of help and information are listed in the publication.

There are no specific national targets for the numbers of special needs trainees. However, TECs are required to provide appropriate training for people with special training needs. The TECs are obliged by contract to identify such people by endorsement procedures in youth training and initial assessment in employment training. They must show in detail in their business plans how they intend to ensure appropriate provision.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places were offered annually under the employment training scheme since its founding; and how many of these positions have been filled by trainees with special needs.

Mr. Jackson: Employment training started in September 1988 with 300,000 available places. During 1989-90 there were an average of 244,000 to 255,000 available places and in 1990-91 there are resources for an average of 215,000 places. In the period September 1988 to September 1990, 11 per cent. of all entrants were people with disabilities and 16 per cent. of all entrants were assessed as having a literacy and/or numeracy training need.

Textile and Clothing Industry

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate how many jobs were lost in the textile and clothing industry in each quarter of 1990 by travel-to-work area and region.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs in manufacturing industry in the north-west of England were lost in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Jackson: There are no figures for job losses and job gains. The available information is as follows:

Employees in manufacturing in the north-west

Unadjusted December each year	*Net change since previous year*
1985	5,000
1986	−11,000
1987	10,000
1988	20,000
1989	−2,000
[1]1990	−2,000

[1] The latest available regional employment estimates are for September 1990.

South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to make available to hon. Members who may request them the documents in relation to the South Glamorgan TEC headquarters building project.

Mr. Jackson: The documents are the property of South Glamorgan TEC which is a private company. Their release is a matter for the TEC.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what date his Department first became aware of the ownership of the company which submitted the winning tender for the construction of the new South Glamorgan training and enterprise council headquarters; and whether there is any commercial connection between this company and members of South Glamorgan TEC.

Mr. Jackson: The contract to build new premises for South Glamorgan training and enterprise council has not yet been awarded.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has now inspected the documents offered to him by South Glamorgan TEC as regards the headquarters building project and the tender procedures used.

Mr. Jackson: I see no need to inspect these documents.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what date his Department contacted the chairman of South Glamorgan TEC regarding the decision on which building company should undertake the work of constructing the TEC's new headquarters building.

Mr. Jackson: Discussions during the development phase of South Glamorgan TEC took place at regular intervals and included various issues including the TEC's premises.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when his Department was notified that the building company owned by the chairman of South Glamorgan TEC had withdrawn its tender for the construction of the TEC's new headquarters building.

Mr. Jackson: On 7 December 1990.

Local Offices

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many representations have been received about the closure of employment service offices during 1990;

(2) how many representations have been received from hon. Members regarding the closure of employment service offices; and how they were dealt with.

Mr. Jackson: Some 140 representations have been made to me, my colleague Ministers and the employment service chief executive about the closure of employment service offices during 1990. Forty-three hon. Members have written to us on this subject. All representations have been taken into account in deciding the future of particular offices.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines exist for TEC's in respect of building projects they may undertake in respect of the procedure for requesting or openly advertising tenders.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils, as private companies, are required to observe the provisions of the Companies Act 1989 and their memorandum and articles of association when tendering for business.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 February 1991

TRANSPORT

Woodford Aerodrome

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations British Aerospace plc has made to his Department about the extent to which Woodford aerodrome in Greater Manchester is functioning within the standards set down by the Civil Aviation Authority; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he has any plans to review the standards laid down by the Civil Aviation Authority governing the use and operating limits of individual aerodromes;

(3) if he will cite the relevant legislation under which the Civil Aviation Authority is empowered to vary or authorise a temporary derogation from the standards laid down governing the use and operating limits of individual aerodromes; and whether he monitors such variations or derogations.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have received no representations from British Aerospace about Woodford aerodrome. The statutory responsibility for regulating the safety of civil aviation in the United Kingdom rests with the Civil Aviation Authority in accordance with the Air Navigation Order 1989. This includes the granting of aerodrome licences to persons or organisations who are deemed by the authority to be fit and competent to hold such licences. I have no plans to review the standards laid down.

Aerodromes

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) for which aerodromes he has appointed British Aerospace plc a statutory undertaker; what was the date of the appointment in each case; and how long he expects the appointments to last;

(2) if he will list the circumstances in which a plc may be appointed statutory undertaker and cite the principal, relevant legislation governing its conduct thereafter.

Mr. McLoughlin: The status of certain operators as statutory undertakers is governed by section 57 of the Airports Act 1986. In the main the airports specified are those which are subject to economic regulation under part IV of the Act. Airports specified in this section are deemed to be statutory undertakers for the purposes of other legislation specified in schedule 2 of the Act.

British Aerospace, through its wholly owned subsidiary British Aerospace (Liverpool Airport) Ltd., owns 76 per cent. of Liverpool Airport plc, which is a statutory undertaker under the 1986 Act. No other airport owned by British Aerospace is a statutory undertaker.

Rolling Stock

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 1991 at col. *520*, what information he has on the numbers of (i) diesel locomotives over 20 years old, (ii) electric locomotives over 20 years old, (iii) high-speed trains over 15 years old and (iv) coaching vehicles over 20 years old, in use by British Rail.

Mr. McLoughlin: Neither the Department of Transport nor Her Majesty's railway inspectorate holds this information.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will introduce an emissions check in the MOT testing scheme for cars.

Mr. Chope: The regulations implementing a carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions check will be made at the earliest opportunity, subject to notification to the EC. I hope that checking will start on 1 November 1991.

If vehicles are to pass the MOT test, they will need to be properly tuned so that carbon monoxide (CO) emissions are kept as low as possible. The standards we will be setting for carbon monoxide levels are realistic, but they will be only minimum standards and motorists should aim to have their vehicles tuned to manufacturers' specifications wherever possible. The hydrocarbon emissions check will enable MOT testers to be sure the engine is running normally before they carry out the carbon monoxide check.

This will be a first step in in-service emissions checking. It is our intention that the standards in the test should reflect future improvements in engine technology and developing international standards.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Geography

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the people who were consulted when the consultative report on attainment targets in geography was revised over Christmas 1990; and how many of these were geographers or geography teachers;

(2) why he decided to remove inquiry skills and land-use conflicts from the attainment targets in geography.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend received advice from the National Curriculum Council in the form of its report on consultation and recommendations for both attainment targets and programmes of study in geography. He accepted the greater part of this advice, but made a number of changes in publishing the draft order for geography. At that time, he explained his view that the main emphasis of the attainment targets should be on the assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding of aspects of geography, and that less emphasis should be placed on the assessment of skills which are not particular to geography and the study of people's attitudes and opinions.

Lancashire County Council

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what requests he has received from Lancashire county council to discuss the 1991-92 capital allocation.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such requests.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the principal achievements of his Department since June 1987.

Mr. Eggar: We have made rapid progress in implementing the important changes introduced by Parliament in 1988 to improve standards and choice.

The Education Reform Act (ERA) includes measures to provide a national curriculum for pupils of compulsory school age, comprising a range of subjects for which targets, programmes of study and testing are being established; to widen the choice available to parents; to ensure that schools can admit pupils up to the limit of their capacity; to require all local education authorities to develop schemes for the local management of their schools, with budgets largely determined by reference to pupil numbers; to offer all schools the opportunity to opt out of local authority control and have grant-maintained status; to establish a number of city technology colleges; to establish polytechnics and other major colleges as independent institutions; to reform the government and management of further education colleges; and to reform the finance and management of the university system.

In addition, the Government continue to seek to improve teaching quality. They are continuing to provide substantial funds through direct grant to support in-service training. The criteria to which courses of initial teacher training must conform have been improved. Regulations are being prepared under which the performance of all teachers in maintained schools will be appraised on a two-year cycle. A range of initiatives has been taken on the supply and recruitment of teachers, and new arrangements for teachers' pay have been brought forward.

The Government have reformed the examination system for 16-year-olds, through the introduction of the GCSE based on national criteria, resulting in a significant increase in attainment: the proportion of school leavers in England with five or more grades A to C at GCSE—O-level—CSE rose from 26·4 per cent. in 1987 to 31·9 per cent. in 1989 and the proportion of 18-year-olds in England achieving two or more A-levels rose from 15·7 per cent. in 1987 to 17·4 per cent. in 1989. The proportion of 16-year-olds participating in full-time education in England rose from 48·4 per cent. in 1987-88 to 55·4 per cent. in 1989-90.

Participation in higher education has increased, with the proportion of 18 to 19-year-olds in Great Britain entering higher education rising from 14·6 per cent. in 1987-88 to nearly 19 per cent. in 1990-91, with every prospect of increasing still further. A student loans scheme, unique in the world in combining universal entitlement with a substantial interest subsidy, has been successfully introduced.

Accreditation of Teacher Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress Her Majesty's inspectorate have made in their role as assessors to the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and to local committees as set out in Department of Education and Science circular 24/89.

Mr. Fallon: Her Majesty's inspectorate attend all meetings of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and as many meetings of the local committees as their other duties permit. Her Majesty's inspectorate comment on proposals for new and revised post-graduate certificate of education (PGCE) and bachelors of education (BEd) courses and contribute as necessary to the work of the committees. Her Majesty's inspectorate assessors are currently evaluating the work of the local committees and their progress during the first year of operation.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much extra money was given to the funding councils in respect of the new criteria and accreditation procedures for teacher training, as per circular 24/89.

Mr. Fallon: Grant to the funding councils took account in both 1990-91 and 1991-92 of the costs associated with the new arrangements for initial teacher training announced in circular 24/89. In neither year were funds earmarked within the total grant made available. It is for the funding councils to determine how to reflect the changes in their allocation of funds to individual institutions.

Music

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the interim report of the national curriculum working group for music will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I will publish the report tomorrow, together with my letter to the chairman of the group, Sir John Manduell. Copies of this initial advice, including my letter, will be placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

London Docklands Communities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of *(a)* public highways and thoroughfares, *(b)* private houses and *(c)* local authority houses that were lost in the development of the London Docklands development scheme; and what resources have been made available to local and family historians to trace such lost communities.

Mr. Key: Developments in London docklands have not led to the loss of any public highways or thoroughfares.

LDDC has sought to minimise the loss of existing public and private housing. Some demolition is unavoidable in connection with the LDDC's Limehouse link road and a small number of smaller schemes. Over 500 households have recently been rehoused in connection with the link. The rehousing options offered by LDDC included three attractive newly built estates to help retain existing communities as well as providing a wide choice of homes in or near the area.

LDDC has also helped a number of docklands organisations involved with local history, including some

£32,000 in grants over the past two years for the Island History Trust, the Rotherhithe heritage museum, and Bermondsey memories.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each category of those eligible for poll tax exemption in 1990-91 his estimates of *(a)* the number exempted and *(b)* the cost to central Government.

Mr. Portillo: The estimated numbers exempt from the personal community charge in England at 1 June 1990 are as follows:

	Number
People whose sole or main residence is in a residential care home, nursing home, private hospital, or hostel providing care, who are receiving care	321,000
Patients whose main residence is an NHS hospital	42,000
Severely mentally handicapped	97,000
Residential care workers employed at a very low salary	1,500
Aged 18 and in receipt of child benefit, or aged 18 or 19 and in full-time education	179,000
Full time students whose term address is in Scotland or Northern Ireland	2,500
Members of religious communities	11,000
Residents of certain crown buildings (mainly military training colleges) for whom the crown makes contributions in aid to local authorities	4,000
Members of visiting forces, international headquarters and defence organisations and their dependents and diplomats	40,000
Contributors to the collective community charge	20,000
In detention (*Source:* Home Office)	45,000

Reliable information on persons without fixed abodes and living in short-stay hostels is not available.

There is no cost to Government as a result of these exemptions since these groups have never been liable to the community charge under the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate how many non-domestic ratepayers in England will have faced rates increases in cash of 50 per cent. or more when comparing 1991-92 bills with those of 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo: I estimate that approximately 700,000 non-domestic properties in England will attract rate bills in 1991-92 which will be more than 50 per cent. higher in cash terms than in 1989-90. This estimate takes no account of any changes in rateable values as a result of appeals.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the increase in percentage terms in the average rate bill paid by *(a)* shops, *(b)* hotels and *(c)* all non-domestic properties between (i) 1989-90 and 1990-91 and (ii) 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: The average percentage increases in rate bills for shops and hotels in England are estimated to be:

	1989-90 to 1990-91	*1990-91 to 1991-92*
Shops	13	15·3
Hotels	23·7	26·4

For non-domestic properties as a whole, average bills will have risen broadly in line with increases in the retail prices index. These estimates do not take account of changes in rateable values as a result of appeals.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the increase in the average non-domestic rate poundage in England in each year from 1981-82 to 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: The percentage increases in the average non-domestic rate poundage are shown in the table:

	Per cent.
1981-82	20·7
1982-83	13·0
1983-84	6·5
1984-85	5·3
1985-86	7·2
1986-87	10·3
1987-88	5·3
1988-89	7·0
1989-90	7·8
1990-91	[1]7·6
1991-92	[1]10·9

[1] The figures given are the RPI figures for September 1989 and September 1990 used in setting the non-domestic rate multipliers for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for *(a)* rate support grant per head, *(b)* business rate income per head and *(c)* total aggregate external finance for each local authority in England.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* I have today arranged for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Joint Police Authorities

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce his proposals for capping of the joint police authorities for 1991-92; what representations he has received concerning the impact of capped police budgets on the recruitment and retention of police officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: We have received a number of comments and representations on our intentions for charge capping for 1991-92, including those made separately to my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and to my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State, Home Office when they met a number of police authority representatives to hear their views. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 29 January, we stand firmly by our intentions for capping, which are, however, necessarily provisional, since under the statute capping decisions cannot be made until authorities have set their budgets.

It is now for each authority to set its budgets having regard to all relevant considerations including its statutory duties, the approved level of police manpower, our intended capping criteria, the need as appropriate for expenditure restraint and the scope for greater efficiency.

My right hon. Friend intends to take his capping decisions as soon as reasonably practicable after authorities have set their budgets. When he comes to do so he will take account of all appropriate considerations.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to replicate the principal civil service pension scheme in the Property Services Agency Government-owned company and to make provision for its replication in the privatised companies.

Mr. Yeo: The Government have made it clear that if PSA is incorporated as a Government-owned company, or sold, steps will be taken to provide transferring employees with pension arrangements that are broadly comparable, and redundancy entitlements that are as far as possible identical, to those they have in the civil service.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it remains Government policy that the Property Services Agency projects will be sold to the private sector this year.

Mr. Yeo: No decisions have been taken on the form or timing of sale.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his intention to proceed with the establishment of the Property Services Agency as a Government-owned company on 1 July; and what plans he has to establish separate Government-owned companies for Property Services Agency Building Management, Property Services Agency Projects, and Property Services Agency Special Services.

Mr. Yeo: No decisions have been taken on whether PSA should trade as a Government-owned company or companies before sale, but a number of companies have been established to protect names.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the value of each item.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the value of each item.

Mr. Heseltine: Information is not available in precisely the form requested. The Department's losses and special payments register, from which the note to the appropriation accounts on losses is prepared, contains the following details for losses by fraud, theft, arson, sabotage, malicious damage and culpable negligence:

	Number of items	*Value £*
1987-88	16	43,570
1988-89	44	23,070
1989-90	13	8,440

It is not possible without disproportionate cost to extract details for individual items or for loss by theft alone.

Estate Action

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress of his Department's estate action work at Wyrley Birch, Birmingham, and give an indication of expected date of completion.

Mr. Yeo: The Wyrley Birch estate action scheme was approved by the Department on 24 November 1989 and was scheduled for completion in 1991-92. The £4·5 million package of works involves nearly 300 flats and maisonettes, which will benefit from refurbishment works, new security measures including a concierge scheme and environmental works. We understand that the works, which are being undertaken by Birmingham city council, are progressing satisfactorily.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce a requirement that building regulations on the construction of new housing and offices should specify higher levels of energy conservation.

Mr. Yeo: Higher thermal insulation standards and other energy conservation measures were incorporated in the amendments to the building regulations and supporting approved documents which took effect on 1 April 1990. We shall be examining the scope for further measures of this kind once we have been able to monitor how the current requirements are working in practice, and in particular whether they are giving rise to any technical problems.

Liverpool

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the recent visit of the Minister for Inner Cities to Liverpool.

Mr. Portillo: My most recent visit to Merseyside was on 10 December 1990. On that day I visited Widnes where I met the leader of Halton borough council at the chemical museum, followed by a tour of derelict land sites and the town centre Victoria square refurbishment. In Birkenhead I performed a ground-breaking ceremony to mark the commencement of an office development at the Pier hotel. During a river crossing from Birkenhead to Liverpool I was appraised of the revitalisation of the Mersey ferries by Merseytravel, and in Liverpool I received a presentation by the Mersey Barrage Company on its proposals.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will give details of the regional distribution of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1991-92.

Sir George Young: In my reply on 17 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), *Official Report*, Vol. 183, column *24*, I gave details of the overall shape of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1991-92. Total net expenditure for that year is set at £1·4 billion, principally for the provision of new housing for rent, but with a significant proportion for low-cost home ownership and with the aim, overall, of tackling homelessness as a priority need.

I have now agreed with the corporation the regional distribution of the programme. The distribution has been determined by reference to the recently revised housing needs indicator as the agreed measure of the incidence of need, but with upward adjustment for some regions to ensure that their permitted new approvals in 1991-92 are restored to 1989-90 levels (the current year's planning having been restricted by the corporation's earlier programming difficulties). My intention is that in 1992-93, the housing needs indicator should be applied without adjustment.

The planned regional distribution of new approvals for housing for rent in 1991-92 is shown in the table, alongside the regions' housing needs indicator scores:

Regional distribution of housing for rent (units)

Region	*Revised HNI scores*	*1991-92 distribution of units*	*1991-92 distribution of units*[1]
	percentage	*percentage*	*numbers*
London and Home Counties (NE)	12·30	11·49	2,320
London and Home Counties (NW)	11·88	11·10	2,240
London and Home Counties (S)	15·61	14·58	2,945
West	12·50	11·68	2,360
East Midlands	9·61	8·98	1,810
West Midlands	10·93	10·94	2,210
North East	13·26	14·46	2,920
North West	10·39	11·05	2,230
Merseyside	3·53	5·72	[2]1,155
Total	[3]100·00	100·00	[4]20,190

[1] Figures represent the (rounded) mid-point of a target range.
[2] Excludes Merseyside special allocation, which provides 184 additional units.
[3] Column does not sum exactly due to rounding.
[4] Excludes special homelessness programme, which targets additional resources on the three London regions and the west.

The same basis for distribution has been used for the remaining elements of the programme, including the allocation for housing for sale.

The housing needs indicator undergoes periodic revision. The recent review was undertaken by a joint working group representing the Department of the Environment, the Housing Corporation and the National Federation of Housing Associations. Copies of the working group's second report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Bathing Waters

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the EC Commission regarding the state of British bathing waters.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke to Commissioner Ripa di Meana on 19 December 1990 about the revised proposals for improving the United Kingdom's bathing waters that we had sent to the EC Commission last November.

The Commissioner was pleased both about the progress we are making in improving standards and about our plans for increased investment in the future. They agreed that United Kingdom and EC Commission officials should study the United Kingdom's proposals in detail so that the Commission could satisfy itself that bathing waters were being improved as quickly as practicable. That work is currently under way.

They also agreed that once the Commission has satisfied itself that the United Kingdom is doing all that is practicably possible there would be no advantage in pursuing further legal proceedings which, of themselves, do nothing to speed improvements.

Sheffield Development Corporation

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken on outstanding matters following Sir John Garlick's inquiry into the running of Sheffield development corporation.

Mr. Portillo: As I told the House on 15 October, the Garlick report contained several criticisms. Action has been taken since then on all these, as follows:

(i) *Guidance on Conflicts of Interest*
I have today issued guidance to the chairmen and board members of all the urban development corporations on arrangements for dealing with conflicts of interest. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

(ii) *Hallamshire Investments*
The chairman of the Sheffielddevelopment corporation, Mr. Sykes, has taken no part in the affairs of Hallamshire since 19 December 1990. His formal resignation, accepted with regret by the board on that day, takes effect on 30 May, and he has leave of absence until then.

(iii) *Secretarial Support: use of SDC facilities for private business*
This problem has been resolved: half a secretarial post is available for Mr. Sykes' SDC business and private business will be conducted elsewhere.

(iv) *Improvement of systems and procedures*
An action plan has been agreed with SDC and is being implemented. This includes a thorough review of systems for handling consultancy appointments.

Community Charge Register

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each authority in England his estimate of the turnover in the community charge register, expressed as a percentage, that will take place during the current financial year; and what is the national figure.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* No estimates of the turnover in community charge registers are currently available. My Department is making arrangements to collect information on the changes to the registers in the year up to 1 June 1991.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he intends to require waste disposal authorities to implement least-cost options where proposals for waste recycling or waste into energy projects are identified as cheaper than landfill;

(2) if he plans to require waste disposal authorities to seek tenders for waste disposal by landfill, waste recycling and energy from waste in parallel.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has no power to require waste disposal authorities to choose one particular waste disposal option over any other. However, part II of schedule 2 to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will require those authorities to subject waste disposal to competitive

tendering and it will empower them to consider maximising recycling and minimising pollution, as well as value for money, when assessing tenders for waste disposal contracts.

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what capital funds and grants are available to a waste disposal authority for the construction of waste recycling centres as part of an energy-from-waste scheme using refuse-derived fuel, in a public-private sector partnership.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* The sources from which local authority capital commitments can be financed are:

(i) credit approvals which permit capital expenditure to be financed by borrowing or by credit arrangements or specified grants to be taken up;
(ii) usable capital receipts;
(iii) Exchequer capital grants or contributions (other than European Community and specified capital grants) and capital grants and contributions from other persons; and
(iv) revenue contributions.

A waste disposal authority may draw on any of these sources of finance for a scheme of the type described by my hon. Friend.

The Government have announced that local authorities in England may bid for £10 million in supplementary credit approvals in 1991-92, which has been earmarked for investment in recycling facilities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Project Funding

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the 42 projects classified in departmental records as negotiated contracts funded out of aid and trade provision monies since 1979; and if he will give the date on which such funding was authorised in each case.

Mr. Redwood: The projects are listed in the table. It should be noted that there are 41 projects listed rather than 42 as given in my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade's previous answer, 24 October 1990, *Official Report*, columns *205-6*. This was because of double counting in the previous answer which has now been corrected.

Country	*Project*	*Company*	*Export value £ million*	*ATP element £ million*	*Date authorised*
Indonesia	Jabotabek Railway Study	L. H. Manderstam	1·000	1·000	June 1984
Malaysia	Ulu Jelai Hydro Feasibility Study	WLPU/Ewbank	1·850	1·850	April 1984
Thailand	Mini Hydros Pilot Plant	Balfour Beatty	2·500	2·500	June 1983
Indonesia	Ombilin Coal Mining Training	Dowty Meco	0·655	0·655	September 1982
Thailand	Post-Harvest Ground Nut Study: Phase II	Rural Investment Overseas	0·499	0·499	April 1984
Indonesia	Jabotabek Feasibility Study	Manderstam/F. Wheeler	0·007	0·007	September 1986
China	Cosco Ships	British Shipbuilders	44·300	13·578	July 1986
Indonesia	Steel Bridging	Mabey & Johnson	10·702	6·846	April 1987
Indonesia	Navigational Aids	Pharos Marine	9·906	7·007	April 1987
Malaysia	Liwagu Hydroelectric Study	Watermeyer/Ewbank	0·850	0·850	October 1986
Malaysia	Rural water supervision	John Taylor	3·000	3·000	October 1985
Panama	Gas Turbine Power Station	JBE	14·222	6·727	October 1987
Seychelles	Mahe Water Consultancy	Sir A. Gibb	0·122	0·122	July 1987
Zimbabwe	Harare Airport	Sir A. Gibb	0·257	0·257	May 1985
China	Bohai Aluminium Phase I	Davey McKee (Poole)	27·750	8·786	April 1988
China	Yue Yang Coal Power Station	GEC	171·718	51·417	July 1987
China	Yue Yang Third Party Inspection	Kennedy and Donkin	0·324	0·324	August 1988
China	Yue Yang Monitoring	Hattersley	0·273	0·273	May 1988
Egypt	Leak Detection Equipment	Palmer Environmental	0·251	0·251	April 1987
Indonesia	Cigading Port	Tarmac Consortium	17·280	13·173	March 1989
Indonesia	Bandung TV Studio	Quantel-Link Systems	11·735	9·201	October 1988
Indonesia	Scattered Diesels	GEC	6·887	5·421	January 1989
Indonesia	Airport Security Systems	Holmes Aviation	0·020	0·020	March 1989
Indonesia	Forest Radio Communications	Phillips Radio Communications	0·228	0·138	April 1988
Kenya	Chemeilil Sugar Mill	Crown Agents	0·003	0·003	April 1985
Kenya	Power Distribution	Private Consultant	0·007	0·007	November 1988
Kenya	Mombasa Causeway	Sir A. Gibb	0·412	0·315	April 1989
Malaysia	Privatisation Programme	J. H. Schroder Wagg & Co.	0·642	0·194	June 1987
Thailand	Laem Chabang Port	Port of Felixstowe Int.	0·151	0·151	May 1986
Zimbabwe	Zisco Monitoring	W. S. Atkins	0·048	0·048	October 1987
Egypt	Maghara Coal Mine	Babcocks	0·080	0·080	October 1988
Indonesia	Radio Studios	David Whittle Associates	0·390	0·390	March 1988
Indonesia	Aircraft Simulator	CAA	0·050	0·050	January 1990

Country	Project	Company	Export value £ million	ATP element £ million	Date authorised
Indonesia	Satellite Remote Sensing	Technology Applied Systems	0·062	0·025	May 1989
Indonesia	Cigading/Serpong Railway Rehabilitation	Davy/British Rail Int.	33·000	20·995	March 1990
Indonesia	Radio Studio Rehabilitation	Audix Ltd.	6·330	5·040	February 1990
Kenya	Digital Micro Wave Link	Telectron Systems	12·040	4·214	June 1989
Morocco	Nador Steel Works Study	W. S. Atkins	0·265	0·133	July 1988
Pakistan	Karachi Water II	Portals Water Treatment	18·940	6·629	July 1988
Phillipines	Gas Turbines Power Station	JBE	37·500	7·276	March 1988
Red Sea	Regional Hydro Carbon Study	Robertson Research Int.	0·375	0·187	May 1989

Telecommunications

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which representative bodies responded to the Government's consultative document, "Competition and Choice: Telecommunications Policy for the 1990s"; and if he will publish their responses.

Mr. Redwood: The representative bodies listed in the table have responded to the consultative document. Unless respondents have indicated otherwise, the Government intend to make public the responses when announcing the conclusions of the review.

Action with Communities in Rural England
Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Disabled and Elderly People
Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Small Businesses
Age Concern England
Association for Information Management (Aslib)
Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
Association of Independent Radio Contractors
Association of the Electronics, Telecommunications and Business Equipment Industries (EEA)
British Computer Society
British Motorship Owners Association
British Telecommunications Unions Committee
Cable Television Association
Computing Services Association
Confederation of Information Communication Industries
Consumers' Association
Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council
English Advisory Committee on Telecommunications
Federation of Communications Services (Cellular Service Providers Group)
Federation of Communications Services (Duopoly review working party)
Gandalf Users Forum
General Council of British Shipping
Gingerbread
Greater London Association for Disabled People
Hull City Council
Institution of Electrical Engineers
Joint Radio Committee of the fuel and power industries
Kent County Council
London Chamber of Commerce and Industry
National Association of Victims Support Schemes
National Consumer Council
National Council for One Parent Families
National Federation of Retirement Pensions Associations
Network Operators Committee (Band III)
Newspaper Society
Northern Ireland Advisory Committee on Telecommunications
Northern Region Councils Association
OFTEL Working Group on Telecommunications for the Hearing Impaired
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
Royal National Institute for the Deaf
Samaritans
Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications
Scottish Council Development and Industry
Sheffield City Council
Specialised Satellite Services Operators Group
Telecommunications Industry Association
Telecommunications Managers Association
Telecommunications Users' Association
UK Offshore Operators Association
UK Paging Operators Association
US Council for International Business
Welsh Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Patent Office

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the Patent Office.

Mr. Leigh: It is important that the financial framework for the Patent Office enables it to provide a high-quality service as economically as possible. However, at present there is no clear relationship between the level of resources allocated to the Patent Office and customer demand. In order to provide such a relationship the Patent Office will move to a net running cost regime from 1 April. While this provides a close link between customer demand and current resources, restrictions will remain, for example, on transferring funds between financial years. Additional flexibilities, which the Patent Office believes would enable it to improve the service provided to customers, would be available to a trading fund established under the Government Trading Act 1990. As announced in the trade and industry expenditure plan report (Cm. 1504) published this week, I hope that the Patent Office will achieve trading fund status later in the 1991-92 financial year. The Patent Office is today opening a consultation process on this proposal, seeking comments by 12 April. I have placed a copy of this letter in the Library.

As part of the process of approving the 1991-92 Patent Office corporate plan a review has been conducted of the performance of the Patent Office against the targets for the period 1990-91 to 1994-95 announced by the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), on 1 March 1990, at column 295. These were three efficiency targets covering annual average improvements in patent search and trade mark productivity and a relative reduction in the size of common services over the five years, together with an annual quality of service measure for patent searches, and a quality of service measure for the five years taken together for trade mark examination. These targets continue to be testing ones for the Patent Office and I do not propose to alter them. I regret, however, that the review has identified an arithmetic error in the calculation of the overall average productivity improvement which results from these targets. The figure should have been 2·5 per cent. a year rather than 4 per cent.

Companies House

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes are planned to the financial regime under which Companies House operates.

Mr. Redwood: Companies House currently operates on a net running cost regime. Although this makes it possible to match resources to fluctuations in workload, it does not enable the agency to work in a fully commercial manner. For example, there are restrictions on transferring funds between financial years.

Companies House plans to take advantage of the greater financial flexibilities which should be available as a trading fund under the Government Trading Act 1990. The aim is to enable the agency to operate more efficiently, so that its many customers can enjoy an even better service representing improved value for money. I hope that Companies House will achieve trading fund status later in 1991-92, as described in the trade and industry expenditure plans report (Cm 1504) published this week.

Companies House is today issuing a consultative letter on these proposals, seeking comments by 12 April. A copy of this letter will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Antarctica

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which members of his Department were on the British delegation to the November 1990 Antarctic treaty meeting; and whether his Department will be represented at the April 1991 meeting of the Antarctic treaty parties.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* An official from my Department was a member of the British delegation to the Antarctic treaty meeting in November 1990, and one will attend the meeting scheduled for April 1991

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution was made by his Department to discussions on environmental protection measures by the Antarctic treaty parties in Chile in 1990.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* An official from my Department was a member of the British delegation to the Antarctic treaty meeting in November 1990 which took an active part in the discussions on a draft protocol to the Antarctic treaty for the protection of the Antarctic environment.

Film Industry

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the level of Government provision of film screen finance since 1987 in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* Italy and *(e)* Spain.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* I have no annual information on the level of Government screen finance in France, Germany, Italy or Spain over this period. In Britain, the Government have provided £2 million a year to British Screen Finance Ltd. The Government also provide funding for the British Film Institute, which supports a number of activities, including film production.

Government support for the British Film Institute since 1987-88 has been as follows:

	Actual expenditure (£ million)
1987-88	10·04
1988-89	11·30
1989-90	11·90
1990-91	[1]12·75

[1] Provision.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the number of British films made in each year since 1980.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* The number of films registered as British for the purposes of the Eady levy in the years 1980 to 1985 was as follows:

	Films
1980	41
1981	32
1982	27
1983	36
1984	37
1985	[1]18

[1] Up to 23 May.

Registration ended with the implementation of the Films Act on 23 May 1985, and no official statistics on the number of British films have been collected since that date.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department has taken over the past 12 months to promote new British films overseas.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* My Department provided financial support to enable 10 film companies to attend the Cannes festival last May, and is providing support for a further 10 companies attending a festival in Los Angeles later this month.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Earnings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the numbers of women who have earnings below *(a)* the tax threshold and *(b)* the national insurance threshold, broken down into married women, lone parents and single women at the latest date.

Mr. Maude: Provisional estimates for 1990-91, based on projections from the 1988 and 1989 family expenditure surveys, are as follows:

Numbers (million)

	Women with earnings below	
	Tax threshold	*National Insurance lower earnings limit*
Single women	0·5	0·4
Lone parents	0·2	0·1
Married women	2·2	1·6

Budget

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects his Budget to be announced.

Mr. Mellor: As the Chancellor told my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) on 31 January, column 1095, he intends to make his Budget statement on 19 March.

General Election Payments

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of fees paid to, charges incurred and expenses claimed by the acting returning officer for the Wrexham constituency for the 1987 general election.

Mr. Maples: The expenses of the Wrexham parliamentary constituency, met from the consolidated fund, were as follows:

	£
Acting Returning Officer's fee	1,073
Presiding Officers' fees	4,225
Poll Clerks' fees	5,330
Clerical assistance	3,050
Renting and adaptation of buildings	6,173
Miscellaneous expenses	4,542
	24,393

Government Employees, Scotland

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the total number of administrative staff employed by the Government in Scotland for each year since 1975, indicating by which Departments they were employed.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Details of the numbers of staff —both non-industrial and industrial—employed in Scotland, by Department, are to be found in the annual Treasury publication "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which may be seen in the statistical unit of the House of Commons Library. (Figures for 1975 and 1976 will be found in the 1976 edition.)

Bingo

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the financial year ended 31 March 1990, how many raids were made by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on non-profit-making clubs for the purpose of checking that the correct bingo duty had been paid; and how much revenue was raised as a result of such raids.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In exercise of their legal responsibility for the care and management of a range of indirect taxes, Customs and Excise make inquiries of, and visit, a variety of businesses and organisations including non-profit making members' clubs which may incur liability to bingo duty. No central record of these inquiries and visits is maintained, or of their effect on the revenue yield from bingo duty. This information could be provided only at the cost of disproportionate time and effort.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Ward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider introducing financial measures to encourage manufacturers to introduce new processes and plants to recycle waste products.

Mr. Maude: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the likely increase in tax receipts in the year 1991-92 in the event that higher rate tax relief on mortgages were to be disallowed.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* The direct revenue cost of mortgage interest relief for 1990-91 at a rate in excess of the basic rate is provisionally estimated to be £470 million. A little over half this accrual cost is reflected in 1990-91 receipts. The estimate is based on the assumption that interest rates remain at their current levels.

Third-world Debt

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the net financial transfer of resources from the United Kingdom to the 17 most indebted countries for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* The data requested are neither collected nor published by individual country.

"Next Steps" Agencies

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards establishing Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue as "next steps" agencies.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[pursuant to the reply, 31 January 1991, c. 573]:* On 25 July 1990 my predecessor announced that changes would be made in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to enable it to operate fully on "next steps" lines, columns *239-41*. The key element of these changes is that 30 commands performing the bulk of the Department's operational and service activities will become executive units. These include the 21 regional collections, the investigation division and certain units at present organised as headquarters divisions.

The head of each unit will be appointed by the chairman of Customs and Excise and will be more personally accountable for the performance of the unit against agreed plans and targets, in return for substantial new freedoms to manage and innovate. This will increase the direct involvement of the head of the unit and all its staff in the tasks to be done, and improve their effectiveness and their personal satisfaction in the unit's achievements. I expect these changes to lead to further advances in the efficiency of the units and the Department as a whole, and the quality of service provided.

These changes are set out in the framework document for the Department, "Next Steps: A Framework for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise", which has been published today, together with framework documents for East Midlands and Manchester collections and the VAT central unit, as the first three in the series of executive unit framework documents which describe the responsibilities, freedoms and accountabilities in individual units. The departmental framework document contains a programme of action which includes the introduction of

significant additional personnel and financial freedoms over the next two to three years. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Framework documents for the remaining executive units will be published before the House rises for the Easter recess. The arrangements proposed for executive units will take effect from 1 April 1991.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Non-governmental Organisations

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the non-governmental organisations associated with overseas development which received financial support from his Department in 1988-89, the total sum recieved by each organisation in that year and the breakdown of the total sum received by each organisation to show separately the sums received *(a)* under the joint funding scheme, *(b)* for emergency relief and *(c)* other.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend will recall the reply I gave to his question on 16 November last year, column *407*, in which contributions to 116 non-governmental organisations in 1988-89 were set out. They totalled £63,214,364, including £11,667,912 from the joint funding scheme and £29,540,580 for emergency relief (disasters, refugees and food aid).

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the individual amounts granted to United Kingdom non-governmental organisations by the European Community in each of the years 1989 and 1990 *(a)* for projects in developing countries, *(b)* for development education and *(c)* other.

Mrs. Chalker: Under its non-governmental organisations programme the European Community co-finances projects in developing countries and development education projects with European non-governmental organisations. Normally the Community contributes 50 per cent. of the costs of individual projects. In 1989, the latest year for which figures are available, amounts granted to United Kingdom non-governmental organisations were as follows:

	£000's
(A) For projects in developing countries	
Acord	75
Action Aid	107
Action of Disability Development	83
Aga Khan Foundation	302
Britain-Tanzania Association	15
British Red Cross	292
Catholic Fund for Overseas Development	336
Catholic Institute for International Relations	355
Christian Aid	625
Church Missionary Society	53
Commonwealth Trade Union Council	37
Cooperation for Development	549
Concern Universal	63
Find Your Feet	17
Harvest Help	93
Health Unlimited	78
Help the Aged	185
Indian Volunteers for Community Development	68
Intermediate Technology Development Group	19
Joe Homan Trust	17
Leonard Cheshire Foundation	201
Lesotho Durham Link	81
Marie Stopes International	443
Methodist Church	19
Opportunities for Women	59
Oxfam	803
Population Concern	316
Ranfurly Library	126
Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind	336
Save the Children Fund	81
Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund	90
SOS-Sahel	42
Tear Fund	272
Tools for Self Reliance	71
Voluntary Service Overseas	263
War on Want	183
Water Aid	137
World University Service—United Kingdom	17
Total	6,909

(B) For Development Education

	£000's
British defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa	9
Catholic Institute of International Relations	121
Centre for International Studies	47
Centre for World Development Education	27
Christian Aid	27
Commonwealth Trade Union Council	161
Derry Development Education Centre	45
International Broadcasting Trust	26
National Association for Developing Education Centres	232
Oxfam	27
Voluntary Service Overseas	17
World Development Movement	68
Total	807

Other

In addition Christian Aid, Oxfam, World University Service—UK, and Leicester WDC—UK received funding for projects in consortium with other European NGOs. The total grants amounted to £1,855,000.

Aid (Africa)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those major capital projects completed over the last two years which were financed by the Overseas Development Administration in Africa.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer Tuesday 12 February]:* The most recent years for which the information requested is available are 1987 and 1988. The list of capital projects completed in those financial years from ODA's bilateral country programme funds and by the Commonwealth Development Corporation is as follows:

Country	*Title*
1987	
Overseas Development Administration	
Kenya	Provision of grain storage facilities.
Malawi	Periodic maintenance of a road linking Liwonde and the port of Monkey Bay.
Mozambique	Provision of trucks, trailers buses, Land Rovers and spare parts from Leyland UK.
Sudan	Red Sea fisheries project to improve catches and design of boats for fishermen.
Swaziland	Rehabilitation of community and Government schools damaged by storms in 1987.

Country	*Title*
Commonwealth Development Corporation	
Botswana	Provision of a power station at Moropule.
Botswana	Telecommunication system improvement for Botswana Telecommunications Corporation.
Ghana	Investment in Twifi oil palm plantations and palm oil mill.
Cote d'Ivoire	Rubber Project II: to promote outgrower rubber production in south-east region.
Cote d'Ivoire	Investment in Societe Africaine de Plantations d'Heveas (rubber producers).
Malawi	Assistance to the Investment and Development Bank which provides development finance to small entrepreneurs.
Mauritius	Investment in Bonair Fashions which manufactures clothes and textiles.
Tanzania	Investment in Kibo Match Corporation Ltd. which is involved in paper board production.
Zambia	Investment in Zambia Oxygen Ltd.
1988	
Overseas Development Administration	
Tunisia	Supply of engine handling equipment for the engine test facility of the Samko diesel engine assembly plant.
Ghana	Agricultural development in the upper region.
Mauritius	Rehabilitation of airconditioning system at the Mauritius Civil Aviation Department's communication centre at Bigara.
Seychelles	Provision of water supply to Mont Buxton.
Seychelles	Rehabilitation of Management Training Centre.
Commonwealth Development Corporation	
Cote d'Ivoire	Rubber Project II: promotes outgrower rubber production in Cavally.
Malawi	Investment in Kavuzi tea estate and factory.
Malawi	Investment in rehabilitation of farms under the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation.
Mauritius	Construction of Mauritius Development Bank (lending to small-scale enterprises).
Mauritius	Assistance to Export Development and Investment Authority which leases factories to entrepreneurs.
Uganda	Rehabilitation of a sugar estate/factory and ethanol distillery owned by Sugar Corporation of Uganda.

WALES

Housing

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Welsh local authorities will continue to provide social housing in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Although local authorities are no longer the principal providers of new social housing they will continue to play a vital enabling role, in partnership with housing associations and the private sector, and in ensuring that the housing requirements of their areas are appropriately tackled.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning council housing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is that council housing should be managed and maintained effectively, economically, and in accordance with local housing authorities' statutory obligations; that council tenants should have the opportunity to purchase their homes under statute; that they should also have a genuine choice of landlord; and that housing associations should continue to be the main providers of new subsidised homes for rent, working in close partnership with local authorities.

Redundancies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by county, the number of confirmed redundancies in Wales in the third quarter of each financial year since 1978-79; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures from 1978-79 to 1980-81 are not available by county. The information from 1981-82 to 1990-91 is set out in the tables.

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Clwyd	1,033	834	303	228	542	405	609	226	340	231
Dyfed	526	948	323	247	572	213	53	31	128	93
Gwent	667	1,630	691	422	1,452	412	142	264	215	541
Gwynedd	136	307	285	175	3	51	48	169	59	0
Mid Glamorgan	1,759	1,717	1,407	556	2,163	289	138	235	305	584
South Glamorgan	702	1,256	500	665	347	536	97	211	128	278
Powys	112	26	0	0	0	0	0	21	73	46
West Glamorgan	1,798	1,121	990	442	939	667	286	188	204	303

The figures quoted relate to the October to December period for each financial year shown.
It should be noted that the 1990-91 figures are still provisional.

Corlan Housing Association

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, columns *409-10*, if he has discussed with the chairman of Tai Cymru its reasons for approving the mortgage application under section 9 of the Housing Associations Act 1985 by Corlan Housing Association for the land that it acquired from Helical Bar Ltd.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives from the Association of District Councils to discuss their proposals for *(a)* an elected Welsh Assembly and *(b)* a single tier of local government in Wales; and whether he will make a statement on both issues.

Mr. David Hunt: I met representatives of the Council of Welsh Districts, together with representatives of the Assembly of Welsh Counties, on 7 January. I am considering the Council of Welsh District's proposals both for an elected Welsh assembly and for a single tier of local government in Wales, and will also be considering other proposals on these matters. I will make my decisions known in due course.

Factories, Cardiganshire

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans the Development Board for Rural Wales has to build advance factories in Cardigan during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Development Board for Rural Wales has the following plans for building advance factories in Cardigan:

Year	*Units*	*Note*
1991-92	2 × 3,000 sq ft	Subject to Welsh Office approval
1992-93	4 × 1,500 sq ft	In draft programme
1993-94	1 × 1,500 sq ft	In draft programme
1994-95	2 × 3,000 sq ft	In draft programme

The development board works to a five-year "outline" industrial development programme, which is modified and reviewed on an ongoing basis. Therefore, any specific proposals beyond 1991-92 are subject to possible alteration and change according to circumstances.

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest developments regarding the building of advance factories at New Quay, Cardiganshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Development Board for Rural Wales has no definite plans to construct units at New Quay at the present time and has no local land holdings.

Farmers

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will next attend a meeting of the European Council of Ministers to discuss the problems now facing Welsh farmers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: In line with long-established practice, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food takes the lead in European Community discussions and negotiations. I know that my right hon. Friend has the interests of Welsh farmers clearly in mind in that context, and I am in regular contact with him.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had in the current year with the National Farmers Union in Wales about livestock compensatory allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I met the National Farmers Union of Wales on Monday 28 January 1991 to discuss, among other issues, hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Sports Centres

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many times he has visited the national sports centre for Wales;

(2) how many times he has visited the outdoor pursuits centre at the Menai straits, Gwynedd.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has not yet had the opportunity to visit the national sports centre for Wales, Cardiff, or the national watersports centre, Plas Menai.

Housing (Elderly People)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many county council homes for the elderly there are in each of the counties of Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is shown in the table:

County	*Number of homes for elderly people*[1]
Clwyd	20
Dyfed	29
Gwent	24
Gwynedd	27
Mid Glamorgan	34
Powys	14
South Glamorgan	21
West Glamorgan	21
Wales	190

[1]As at 31 March 1990.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policy initiatives he proposes for the running of county council homes for the elderly in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend's proposals for the further improvement of services for elderly people in Wales is set out in chapter 11 of the White Paper "Caring for People—Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond" (Cm 849). As regards county council-run homes, the White Paper makes it clear that we intend that their standard should be at least on a par with those expected by county councils of the private and voluntary sectors, and that those standards should be monitored and controlled by the inspection units which authorities are required to set up by 1 April 1991. In drawing up their plans for social care, which are to be published by 1 April 1992, social services authorities will need to review, in the light of their assessment of local needs and circumstances, the extent and nature of the residential care they provide. They will need to do this in terms of the balance with wider patterns of domiciliary and day care and also with regard to the need to maximise choice from a variety of sources of care.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* private nursing homes and *(b)* private residential homes there are in each of the counties of Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is shown in the following tables:

County	*Number of private nursing homes*[1]
Clwyd	70
Dyfed	25
Gwent	51

County	Number of private nursing homes[1]
Gwynedd	28
Mid Glamorgan	8
Powys	8
South Glamorgan	16
West Glamorgan	67
Wales	273

[1] As at 31 March 1990.

Number of private residential homes[1]

County	Elderly, younger physically handicapped and blind people[2]	Mentally ill people	Mentally handicapped people
Clwyd	151	6	22
Dyfed	69	3	8
Gwent	22	—	2
Gwynedd	84	4	7
Mid Glamorgan	32	—	1
Powys	17	4	5
South Glamorgan	79	—	—
West Glamorgan	26	6	16
Wales	480	23	61

[1] As at 31 March 1990.
[2] A number of these homes are dually registered as both nursing and residential homes and will therefore have also been included in the first table.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning private nursing and residential homes in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend's proposals for the further improvement of all forms of social care are set out in chapter 11 of the White Paper "Caring for People —Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond" (Cm 849). The Government believe that people should enter residential and nursing home care as a positive choice. Social services authorities, working closely with health authorities and other interests, should ensure the development of adequate networks of domiciliary, day and residential care in the private, voluntary and public sectors which maximise choice and ensure high quality in all aspects of provision.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Surplus Food

Mr. Burns: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements he is making for implementing the EC surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom for 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission has reviewed the operation of this scheme in 1988 and 1989, and its report is awaited. In the meantime the Commission has decided to continue the distribution of surplus food from intervention stocks to the most deprived citizens of the Community. I have to say that the Government's view remains that the scheme is an inefficient method of dealing with surpluses and of assisting those whom it should help. Nevertheless, as in the past, the Government do not wish to deprive eligible United Kingdom citizens of an opportunity available to their counterparts elsewhere in the Community.

The Commission has allocated some 150 million ecu to the European Community for this purpose, the same as in 1990. The United Kingdom has maintained its share of the budget in obtaining some 24·95 million ecu, which represents about £17·62 million worth of butter and beef. This produce will continue to be distributed in the United Kingdom by those charitable and other non-profit making organisations wishing to do so and meeting the prescribed conditions. To improve the cost-effectiveness of the scheme, preference may be given to organisations capable of distributing produce widely throughout their local community and to groups of smaller organisations co-operating in the same locality. The scheme applies to certain clearly defined categories of people. Pensioners or the unemployed are eligible only if they fall into one or other of these categories. The coverage of those who are eligible will depend on the extent to which suitable organisations volunteer to participate. I am arranging for further details to be publicised widely and to be sent to the appropriate bodies, and I will place a copy of this information in the Library.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Mans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 19 and 20 December.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 14 January 1991, Official Report, col. 388]:* I am pleased to announce that the Commission has agreed that the United Kingdom may exempt from the days in port requirement any vessel which satisfies the Fisheries Departments that it will carry only longlines or nets having a mesh size equal to or greater than 110 mm, with or without a 100 mm square mesh panel. Regulations to amend the Sea Fishing (Days in Port) Regulations 1991 (SI 1991/139) will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has received from the National Rivers Authority concerning burial of BSE-affected cattle by farmers under their own land.

Mr. Maclean: The National Rivers Authority has provided advice on the burial of carcases generally which has been incorporated into the revised "Guidance of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water" which was published in draft on 15 January. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Grain

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether all export contracts on grain exported to the EC state EC mass per storage volume, as set out in SI 1975 No. 655, arranged by British Cereal Exports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: British Cereal Exports is a promotional body which aims to identify the needs of grain buyers in export markets and to help ensure that these are met competitively by United Kingdom exporters. It does not itself export grain.

The details of grain export contracts are matters to be determined by the exporter and the importer of the grain. Cereals export trade organisations have recently been reminded of the provisions of SI 1975 No. 655 which lays down specific requirements to be met if the term EC mass per storage volume is used in trade in cereals between the United Kingdom and other member states of the European Community.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the specific weight of grain taken into intervention in the United Kingdom is assessed on instruments which comply with the requirements of SI 1975 No. 655; and what those regulations require in respect of contracts for grain weighed out of intervention containing the words EC mass per storage volume.

Mr. Curry: The use of instruments complying with the requirements of SI 1975, No. 655 is not stipulated by EC regulation 1908/84, which governs intake of grain into intervention, nor are such instruments used for that purpose in practice. Contracts for sales of grain out of intervention do not contain the words "EC mass per storage volume"; they are not affected, therefore, by the provisions of the SI, which is concerned only with trade in cereals between the United Kingdom and other member states of the European Community.

Tourism

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, further to his answer of 1 February at column *693*, to the hon. Member for Swindon, he will list those organisations in the tourism industry which *(a)* were asked for their views and *(b)* responded.

Mr. Curry: We did not specifically ask organisations for their views before the abolition of these capital grants because this would have given a clear signal of our intentions and would have led to a rush of applications to beat the deadline. Over the period since the introduction of the farm diversification grant scheme in 1988, the Government have received representations about it from a number of organisations, including:

The National Farmers Union
The Country Landowners Association
The English Tourist Board
The British Hotels, Restaurants and Caterers Association
The Youth Hostels Association

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the number of individual confirmed cases of bovine tuberculosis by month, for each county of England and Wales in 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is available only by quarter. Figures for October to December are provisional pending laboratory tests. Details for England are given in the following table.

The figures for Wales are a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

Number of confirmed cases of bovine tuberculosis by county in England 1990

	January–March	*April–June*	*July–September*	*October–December*
Avon / Gloucestershire	7	14	5	n/y/a
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	n/y/a
Berkshire	0	0	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	n/y/a
Cheshire	0	1	0	0
Cleveland	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	4	13	10	n/y/a
Cumbria	0	7	1	1
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0
Devon	10	7	8	n/y/a
Dorset	1	2	2	n/y/a
Durham	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	n/y/a
Kent	0	0	0	0
Hampshire	0	0	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
Humberside	0	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	1	0	n/y/a
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	0
Merseyside	0	0	0	0

	January–March	April–June	July–September	October–December
West Midlands	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	n/y/a
Northumberland	1	3	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0
Somerset	0	1	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Surrey	0	0	0	0
East Sussex	1	0	3	n/y/a
West Sussex	0	0	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0
Wiltshire	1	1	1	n/y/a
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	0
ENGLAND TOTAL	25	50	30	1

n/y/a—Not yet available.

Fallen Animals

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to assist hill farmers who are experiencing problems with disposal of fallen stock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the present situation in respect of the disposal of fallen animals; and if he intends to introduce any legislation in this area.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Members to the letter I wrote on 30 January to Sir Simon Gourlay, president of the National Farmers Union, on this matter, a copy of which I have placed in the Library of the House. I have no current plans to introduce any further legislation.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Correspondence

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the latest estimate of the average cost of a ministerial reply to letters from right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. MacGregor: No definite costings are available. A recent scrutiny of ministerial correspondence estimated total costs of £17·5 million for some 250,000 ministerial replies, a mean average of £70. The estimate was based on small samples, and revealed a considerable range of costs related to the complexity of each Department's caseload.

1851 Exhibition

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the holder of his office last attended a meeting of the royal commissioners for the exhibition of 1851.

Mr. MacGregor: My predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), attended a meeting of the commissioners in December 1989.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases related to non-payment of the poll tax have been dealt with by each magistrates court in Wales during 1990; and what was the average amount of time allocated to cases of non-payment of the poll tax by each magistrates court.

Mr. John Patten: The figures for the number of summonses and liability orders issued and the amount of time devoted to the enforcement of the community charge by magistrates courts in Wales during 1990 are set out in the table:

Community Charge enforcement in Wales in 1990

	Summonses	Liability orders	Sitting hours
Hawarden	48	3	1
Rhuddlan	—	—	—
Wrexham Maelor	5,840	3,665	20·5
Llanelli	2,077	1,145	34
Gogledd Ceredigion	2,978	2,242	62
Carmarthen South	5,367	3,412	21
Cleddau	4,846	3,869	55
Bedwellty	500	388	5
East Gwent	6,918	596	25
Newport	5,301	3,214	15
Conwy & Llandudno	5,911	3,951	27
North Anglesey	2,053	1,307	13
Penllyn	—	—	—
Caernarfon & Gwyrfai	3,559	1,082	8
Lower Rhymney Valley	5,765	4,441	24
Merthyr Tydfil[1]	—	—	—
Miskin	15,990	11,988	29
Newcastle & Ogmore	15,815	12,662	48

[1] Figures for Merthyr Tydfil based on first return: 1 April-30 September 1990

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money is currently allocated to magistrates courts specifically to assist with cases related to the poll tax; and whether he has any plans to increase resources to deal with the current situation.

Mr. John Patten: Specific grant is provided to support expenditure on the workload of the magistrates courts as

a whole. The Government's proposals for increased grant support were set out in the Home Office annual report 1991 (Cm 1509), but we continue to keep the community charge enforcement position under review.

Probation Service

Mr. Bidwell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had concerning delay in implementing the pay increase for probation officers of November 1990; what assessment he has made of the effect of the delay on morale in the service; and to when the increase will be backdated.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is yet in a position to authorise the new salary scale for probation officers upon which there has been arbitration.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the probation officers' 1990-91 pay award.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about the length of time it has taken to fix the increase in probation officers' salaries effective from 1 July 1990.

The main part of the delay was due to the staff side's decision to refer the matter unilaterally to arbitration. My right hon. Friend received the report of the ACAS arbitration panel on 6 November 1990, nearly four months after the employers' side made their final offer of 9·25 per cent.

Our decision to accept the increase of 9·25 per cent. and one of the three structural changes to the salary scale included in the arbitration award was announced on 6 February 1991. I expect most probation officers to see this decision as reasonable.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the principal achievements of his Department since June 1987.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The number of police posts in England and Wales increased by 4,285, bringing the total to 127,155. The number of civilians supporting the police increased by 4,699 to 45,405, and since 1986-87 expenditure on the police has increased by 19·5 per cent. in real terms. These increases have been accompanied by action to ensure that the police use their resources efficiently and to enhance their capacity to deal with crime of all kinds, including that with an international dimension.

Sixteen safer cities projects have been set up in inner-city areas supporting over 850 initiatives with the objective of reducing crime, lessening the fear of crime and creating conditions in which economic enterprise and community life can flourish. Crime Concern, an independent body which seeks to encourage and facilitate local crime prevention activity and to draw the business sector into crime prevention, has been established. Advice on crime prevention has been issued to local authorities, other relevant agencies and to the public, with over 3 million copies of the crime prevention handbook distributed. The standing conference on crime prevention meets annually to discuss and promote new crime prevention ideas.

My Department has continued to give the highest priority to tackling drug misuse. The London world ministerial drug summit reaffirmed our commitment to be at the forefront, both at home and abroad, of efforts to combat drug misuse. Reciprocal agreements with seven further countries on confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking have been concluded, bringing the total to 19. The first five local teams set up under the drug prevention initiative to strengthen community resistance to drug misuse have now started work.

Legislation has been passed to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the United Nations convention against the illicit traffic in drugs; to enhance the control of firearms; to strengthen the country's defences against terrorism; to increase the powers available to the courts for dealing with football hooligans; to improve our ability to give effect to our policy of firm but fair immigration control; to create a new and more open and competitive framework for the licensing and regulation of independent radio and television services, leading to greater choice for viewers and listeners while maintaining proper safeguards for programme quality and standards; to remove outdated restrictions on licensing laws; to enable the United Kingdom to participate more effectively in the international fight against crime, including a major reform of the extradition law; to make provision for courts to order the confiscation of the proceeds of profitable crime; to provide for unduly lenient sentences to be reviewed; to create a statutory right for the victims of crime to receive compensation; to tighten the law on possession of knives and to ban the sale of offensive weapons which have no legitimate use; to strengthen the jury system; to reform the law on official secrets by replacing section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 with provisions protecting just six classes of official information; and to put the security service on a statutory basis, with the appointment of a commissioner and provision for complaints to be made to an independent tribunal. Legislation has been passed to encourage key Hong Kong personnel and their families to remain there by giving them the assurance of British citizenship in order to help them maintain the future stability and prosperity of the territory.

Since the beginning of 1987 five new prisons have been opened, providing some 2,500 places, and construction has begun at 13 other sites, which will provide nearly 8,000 additional prison places. By the end of March 1991 nearly 3,000 more places will also have been provided at existing establishments. The Home Office has embarked on a major programme to improve existing prisons. At the beginning of 1987 about 45 per cent. of prison places had access to night sanitation, but by April this year 60 per cent. of all places are expected to have access. Conversion of the remaining places is a high priority.

Television Licences

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to provide for the issue of refunds for unexpired television licences where the person to whom the licence was issued has died and more than one month remains valid on the licence.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the estimated cost of the concessions of the reduced television licence for registered blind people;

(2) whether he has any proposals to extend the reduced cost television licence currently available to registered blind people to those who are registered as partially sighted.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The cost of the concession in 1989-90 in terms of revenue forgone was £47,500. The concession is available to people so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential. There are no plans to change that criterion.

Police, Staffordshire

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what increase has been made to the number of police officers and civilian auxiliaries for Staffordshire over each of the past five years; and what has been the increase or decrease in crimes reported, detected and cleared up over that period.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the tables:

(i) Increase in resources

Year	*Police Officer Establishment*	*Civilian Staff*
1985-86	Nil	+20
1986-87	+27	+11
1987-88	+25	+3
1988-89	+10	+3
1989-90	+22	−24
1990-91	+14	+41

(ii) Changes in level of crime

Year	*Increase/decrease in recorded crime per cent*	*Increase/decrease in clear-up rate per cent*
1985	+3	+9
1986	+8	−7
1987	+1	−4
1988	−2	+7
1989	+5	+1
1990	N.A.	N.A.

Voluntary Repatriation

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the facilities available for immigrants who seek voluntary repatriation; how many have applied for such repatriation over the past five years; what has been the cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Financial assistance is available in certain circumstances from public funds for non-British citizens settled in this country who wish to return permanently overseas to a non-European country. The scheme, which is operated under section 29 of the Immigration Act 1971, is administered on behalf of the Government by the International Social Service of Great Britain. Assistance, which is means-tested, and is limited to the payment of fares and incidental expenses incurred in leaving the United Kingdom, including the transport of a small amount of personal effects. There is no resettlement grant.

Over the past five years the number of applications, the number of cases assisted, the number of individuals leaving the United Kingdom and the cost were as follows:

Financial year	*Applications*	*Cases assisted*	*Individuals benefitting*	*Cost*[1] *£*
1986-87	141	41	65	51,425·87
1987-88	89	38	61	41,400·23
1988-89	75	37	45	45,541·08
1989-90	70	43	55	42,484·65
1990-91[2]	41	25	29	30,666·02

[1] Excluding administrative overheads.
[2] To 8 February 1991.

Parking, London

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will hold discussions with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the scope for further action by officers to deter the parking of untaxed and uninsured vehicles on streets in Greater London.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The enforcement of offences relating to untaxed and uninsured vehicles is an operational matter and therefore for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I understand that police officers and traffic wardens routinely report vehicle excise offences involving parked vehicles to the Department of Transport and support enforcement campaigns run by that Department. Insurance offences normally come to light only when a driver is stopped and asked to produce his documents.

Overseas Electors

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by parliamentary constituency, the numbers of overseas electors included in the draft electoral register for 1991-92, together with totals for each constituent part of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is set out in the table. The figures do not include valid applications which were received too late for inclusion in the draft register, which was published on 28 November 1990. Final figures for the electoral register for 1991-92 will be published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in the summer.

Overseas electors included in the draft electoral register published on 28 November 1990 by Parliamentary Constituency

	Number
England	28,512
Aldershot	112
Aldridge-Brownhills	26

	Number
Altrincham and Sale	87
Amber Valley	19
Arundel	62
Ashfield	12
Ashford	74
Ashton-under-Lyne	11
Aylesbury	82
Banbury	61
Barking	8
Barnsley Central	2
Barnsley East	4
Barnsley West and Penistone	15
Barrow and Furness	44
Basildon	38
Basingstoke	78
Bassetlaw	37
Bath	80
Batley and Spen	33
Battersea	112
Beaconsfield	151
Beckenham	66
Berwick-upon-Tweed	29
Bethnal Green and Stepney	22
Beverley	57
Bexhill and Battle	96
Bexleyheath	29
Billericay	51
Birkenhead	26
Birmingham, Edgbaston	62
Birmingham, Erdington	9
Birmingham, Hall Green	12
Birmingham, Hodge Hill	13
Birmingham, Ladywood	18
Birmingham, Northfield	25
Birmingham, Perry Barr	21
Birmingham, Selly Oak	70
Birmingham, Small Heath	7
Birmingham, Sparkbrook	18
Birmingham, Yardley	9
Bishop Auckland	21
Blaby	53
Blackburn	30
Blackpool North	22
Blackpool South	33
Blaydon	22
Blyth Valley	22
Bolsover	2
Bolton North East	17
Bolton South East	9
Bolton West	36
Boothferry	46
Bootle	17
Bosworth	42
Bournemouth East	63
Bournemouth West	53
Bow and Poplar	21
Bradford North	30
Bradford South	25
Bradford West	32
Braintree	67
Brent East	50
Brent North	119
Brent South	27
Brentford and Isleworth	102
Brentwood and Ongar	104
Bridgwater	54
Bridlington	39
Brigg and Cleethorpes	59
Brighton, Kemptown	92
Brighton, Pavilion	95
Bristol East	25
Bristol North West	130
Bristol South	14
Bristol West	171
Bromsgrove	26
Broxbourne	87
Broxtowe	49

	Number
Buckingham	92
Burnley	13
Burton	33
Bury North	38
Bury South	64
Bury St. Edmunds	68
Calder Valley	37
Cambridge	243
Cannock and Burntwood	26
Canterbury	76
Carlisle	21
Carshalton and Wallington	39
Castle Point	45
Central Suffolk	48
Cheadle	76
Chelmsford	80
Chelsea	153
Cheltenham	85
Chertsey and Walton	151
Chesham and Amersham	173
Chesterfield	19
Chichester	115
Chingford	36
Chipping Barnet	69
Chislehurst	65
Chorley	40
Christchurch	76
Cirencester and Tewkesbury	78
City of Chester	80
City of Durham	41
City of London and Westminster, South	207
Colne Valley	29
Congleton	45
Copeland	28
Corby	48
Coventry North East	18
Coventry North West	21
Coventry South East	20
Coventry South West	53
Crawley	69
Crewe and Nantwich	39
Crosby	68
Croydon Central	50
Croydon North East	57
Croydon North West	41
Croydon South	97
Dagenham	8
Darlington	38
Dartford	53
Daventry	77
Davyhulme	54
Denton and Reddish	22
Derby North	24
Derby South	24
Devizes	104
Dewsbury	17
Don Valley	18
Doncaster Central	23
Doncaster North	13
Dover	65
Dudley East	20
Dudley West	28
Dulwich	88
Ealing, Acton	138
Ealing North	53
Ealing, Southall	53
Easington	5
East Berkshire	124
East Hampshire	117
East Lindsey	37
East Surrey	90
Eastbourne	107
Eastleigh	87
Eccles	24
Eddisbury	85

	Number
Edmonton	32
Ellesmere Port and Neston	37
Elmet	29
Eltham	46
Enfield North	23
Enfield, Southgate	83
Epping Forest	60
Epsom and Ewell	91
Erewash	25
Erith and Crayford	16
Esher	176
Exeter	76
Falmouth and Camborne	45
Fareham	106
Faversham	58
Feltham and Heston	56
Finchley	94
Folkestone and Hythe	52
Fulham	159
Fylde	54
Gainsborough and Horncastle	38
Gateshead East	28
Gedling	32
Gillingham	41
Glanford and Scunthorpe	40
Gloucester	26
Gosport	70
Grantham	62
Gravesham	53
Great Grimsby	13
Great Yarmouth	39
Greenwich	60
Guildford	127
Hackney North and Stoke Newington	38
Hackney South and Shoreditch	34
Halesowen and Stourbridge	35
Halifax	27
Halton	26
Hammersmith	68
Hampstead and Highgate	194
Harborough	78
Harlow	39
Harrowgate	84
Harrow East	73
Harrow West	83
Hartlepool	20
Harwich	60
Hastings and Rye	53
Havant	95
Hayes and Harlington	26
Hazel Grove	42
Hemsworth	14
Hendon North	48
Hendon South	113
Henley	139
Hereford	54
Hertford and Stortford	102
Hertsmere	85
Hexham	49
Heywood and Middleton	17
High Peak	68
Holborn and St. Pancras	108
Holland with Boston	11
Honiton	66
Hornchurch	29
Hornsey and Wood Green	199
Horsham	116
Houghton and Washington	22
Hove	89
Huddersfield	34
Huntingdon	65
Hyndburn	9
Ilford North	32
Ilford South	39

	Number
Ipswich	38
Isle of Wight	93
Islington North	92
Islington South and Finsbury	99
Jarrow	16
Keighley	61
Kensington	140
Kettering	39
Kingston upon Hull East	10
Kingston upon Hull North	35
Kingston upon Hull West	8
Kingston upon Thames	114
Kingswood	40
Knowsley North	13
Knowsley South	17
Lancaster	63
Langbaurgh	54
Leeds, Central	10
Leeds, East	16
Leeds, North East	54
Leeds, North West	39
Leeds, West	14
Leicester, East	10
Leicester, South	44
Leicester, West	8
Leigh	14
Leominster	93
Lewes	111
Lewisham, Deptford	27
Lewisham, East	45
Lewisham, West	60
Leyton	29
Lincoln	27
Littleborough and Saddleworth	48
Liverpool, Broadgreen	26
Liverpool, Garston	28
Liverpool, Mossley Hill	42
Liverpool, Riverside	19
Liverpool, Walton	16
Liverpool, West Derby	16
Loughborough	42
Ludlow	46
Luton, South	48
Macclesfield	100
Maidstone	55
Makerfield	26
Manchester, Blackley	20
Manchester, Central	15
Manchester, Gorton	36
Manchester, Withington	77
Manchester, Wythenshawe	17
Mansfield	11
Medway	58
Meriden	47
Mid Bedfordshire	85
Mid Kent	42
Mid Norfolk	57
Mid Staffordshire	29
Mid Sussex	105
Mid Worcestershire	39
Middlesbrough	17
Milton Keynes	114
Mitcham and Morden	39
Mole Valley	121
Morecambe and Lunesdale	37
Morley and Leeds South	6
New Forest	80
Newark	18
Newbury	109
Newcastle upon Tyne Central	64
Newcastle upon Tyne East	26
Newcastle upon Tyne North	25
Newcastle-under-Lyme	24

	Number
Newham North East	14
Newham North West	19
Newham South	16
Normanton	11
North Bedfordshire	93
North Colchester	77
North Cornwall	55
North Devon	75
North Dorset	56
North Durham	20
North East Cambridgeshire	37
North East Derbyshire	25
North Hertfordshire	107
North Luton	65
North Norfolk	47
North Shropshire	43
North Thanet	45
North Warwickshire	27
North West Durham	20
North West Hampshire	87
North West Leicestershire	29
North West Norfolk	53
North West Surrey	156
North Wiltshire	83
Northampton North	40
Northampton South	54
Northavon	14
Norwich North	48
Norwich South	94
Norwood	54
Nottingham East	38
Nottingham North	6
Nottingham South	46
Nuneaton	24
Old Bexley and Sidcup	42
Oldham Central and Royton	20
Oldham West	17
Orpington	84
Oxford East	105
Oxford West and Abingdon	198
Peckham	21
Pendle	43
Penrith and The Border	38
Peterborough	43
Plymouth, Devonport	39
Plymouth, Drake	39
Plymouth, Sutton	52
Pontefract and Castleford	4
Poole	68
Portsmouth, North	29
Portsmouth, South	48
Preston	22
Pudsey	18
Putney	161
Ravensbourne	67
Reading, East	123
Reading, West	79
Redcar	40
Reigate	100
Ribble Valley	66
Richmond (Yorks)	33
Richmond and Barnes	210
Rochdale	38
Rochford	69
Romford	23
Romsey and Waterside	83
Rossendale and Darwen	36
Rother Valley	10
Rotherham	13
Rugby and Kenilworth	139
Ruislip-Northwood	61
Rushcliffe	51
Rutland and Melton	88
Ryedale	21

	Number
Saffron Walden	82
St. Albans	150
St. Helens, North	34
St. Helens, South	17
St. Ives	64
Salford, East	22
Salisbury	85
Scarborough	52
Sedgefield	19
Selby	43
Sevenoaks	85
Sheffield, Attercliffe	19
Sheffield, Brightside	8
Sheffield, Central	26
Sheffield, Hallam	87
Sheffield, Heeley	18
Sheffield, Hillsborough	16
Sherwood	40
Shipley	66
Shoreham	91
Shrewsbury and Atcham	28
Skipton and Ripon	53
Slough	39
Solihull	76
Somerton and Frome	80
South Colchester and Maldon	65
South Derbyshire	27
South Dorset	29
South East Cambridgeshire	93
South East Cornwall	67
South East Staffordshire	12
South Hams	57
South Norfolk	60
South Ribble	46
South Shields	8
South Staffordshire	32
South Suffolk	46
South Thanet	52
South West Bedfordshire	75
South West Cambridgeshire	111
South West Hertfordshire	113
South West Norfolk	44
South West Surrey	121
South Worcestershire	119
Southampton Itchen	55
Southampton Test	73
Southend East	42
Southend West	44
Southport	65
Southwark and Bermondsey	16
Spelthorne	70
Stafford	73
Staffordshire Moorlands	27
Stalybridge and Hyde	42
Stamford and Spalding	57
Stevanage	74
Stockport	38
Stockton, North	35
Stockton, South	48
Stoke-on-Trent, Central	7
Stoke-on-Trent, North	7
Stoke-on-Trent, South	10
Stratford-on-Avon	64
Streatham	95
Stretford	30
Stroud	89
Suffolk Coastal	79
Sunderland, North	16
Sunderland, South	23
Surbiton	66
Sutton and Cheam	81
Sutton Coldfield	60
Swindon	63
Tatton	71
Taunton	59
Teignbridge	54
The Wrekin	21

	Number
Thurrock	13
Tiverton	68
Tonbridge and Malling	74
Tooting	86
Torbay	83
Torridge and West Devon	73
Tottenham	30
Truro	57
Tunbridge Wells	93
Twickenham	139
Tyne Bridge	2
Tynemouth	33
Upminster	36
Uxbridge	47
Vauxhall	95
Wakefield	25
Wallasey	56
Wallsend	18
Walsall North	17
Walsall South	14
Walthamstow	28
Wansbeck	6
Wansdyke	59
Wanstead and Woodford	58
Wantage	89
Warley East	8
Warley West	1
Warrington North	30
Warrington South	39
Warwick and Leamington	68
Watford	78
Waveney	65
Wealden	100
Wellingborough	55
Wells	39
Welwyn Hatfield	96
Wentworth	16
West Bromwich East	14
West Bromwich West	—
West Derbyshire	46
West Dorset	57
West Gloucestershire	50
West Hertfordshire	95
West Lancashire	44
Westbury	132
Westminster North	136
Westmoreland and Lonsdale	50
Weston-Super-Mare	47
Wigan	30
Wimbledon	144
Winchester	74
Windsor and Maidenhead	115
Wirral South	58
Wirral West	60
Witney	80
Woking	170
Wokingham	105
Wolverhampton North East	11
Wolverhampton South East	10
Wolverhampton South West	33
Woodspring	54
Woolwich	19
Worcester	45
Workington	12
Worsley	26
Worthing	74
Wycombe	104
Wyre	39
Wyre Forest	51
Yeovil	60
York	80

Overseas electors included in the draft electoral register published on 28 November 1990 by Parliamentary Constituency

	Number
Wales	867
Aberavon	4
Alyn and Deeside	21
Blaenau Gwent	4
Brecon and Radnor	26
Bridgend	40
Caernarfon	16
Caerphilly	10
Cardiff Central	70
Cardiff North	32
Cardiff South and Penarth	25
Cardiff West	29
Carmarthen	22
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	33
Clwyd North West	32
Clwyd South West	21
Conwy	35
Cynon Valley	1
Delyn	25
Gower	29
Islwyn	9
Llanelli	13
Meirionnydd Nan Conwy	8
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	9
Monmouth	54
Montgomery	7
Neath	7
Newport East	13
Newport West	34
Ogmore	9
Pembroke	47
Pontypridd	24
Rhondda	3
Swansea East	9
Swansea West	31
Torfaen	11
Vale of Glamorgan	53
Wrexham	26
Ynys Môn	25

Overseas electors included in the draft electoral register published on 28 November 1990 by Parliamentary Constituency

	Number
Scotland	1,445
Aberdeen, North	12
Aberdeen, South	52
Angus, East	25
Argyll and Bute	16
Ayr	19
Banff and Buchan	7
Caithness and Sutherland	9
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	9
Central Fife	10

	Number
Clackmannan	12
Clydebank and Milngavie	3
Clydesdale	4
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	12
Cunninghame, North	20
Cunninghame, South	4
Dumbarton	4
Dumfries	18
Dundee, East	29
Dundee, West	16
Dunfermline, East	17
Dunfermline, West	12
East Kilbride	8
East Lothian	21
Eastwood	40
Edinburgh Central	85
Edinburgh East	22
Edinburgh, Leith	44
Edinburgh, Pentlands	46
Edinburgh South	102
Edinburgh West	48
Falkirk East	18
Falkirk West	11
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	19
Glasgow, Cathcart	15
Glasgow Central	8
Glasgow, Garscadden	3
Glasgow, Govan	8
Glasgow, Hillhead	44
Glasgow, Maryhill	12
Glasgow, Pollok	10
Glasgow, Provan	2
Glasgow, Rutherglen	6
Glasgow, Shettleston	5
Glasgow, Springburn	39
Gordon	4
Greenock and Port Glasgow	1
Hamilton	39
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	9
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	58
Kincardine and Deeside	18
Kirkcaldy	7
Linlithgow	7
Livingston	20
Midlothian	2
Monklands East	7
Monklands West	12
Moray	2
Motherwell North	3
Motherwell South	38
North East Fife	26
North Tayside	13
Orkney and Shetland	21
Paisley North	16
Paisley South	35
Perth and Kinross	47
Renfrew West and Inverclyde	24
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	9
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	54
Stirling	11
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	34
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	2
Western Isles	177
Northern Ireland	

	Number
Belfast East	20
Belfast North	11
Belfast South	21
Belfast West	8
East Antrim	9
East Londonderry	7
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	9
Foyle	3
Lagan Valley	12
Mid Ulster	11
Newry and Armagh	6
North Antrim	9
North Down	20
South Antrim	8
South Down	4
Strangford	12
Upper Bann	7
United Kingdom Total	31,001

Drug Offences

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the latest recorded figures for convictions for *(a)* class 1 and *(b)* class 2 drug offences and the figures for each year from 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 4 February 1991]:* Data are readily available only for 1986 onwards and information on the number of convictions recorded in the United Kingdom concerning class A and class B drugs is given in the table.

United Kingdom

Year	Number of convictions relating to: Class A drugs	Class B drugs
1986	4,486	21,155
1987	4,263	21,489
1988	3,692	23,102
1989	3,752	26,759

Adoption

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many clearance papers were issued for the admission to the United Kingdom of children adopted abroad, or in the process of adoption, for each of the last five years in total and by country of origin; and if he will make a statement concerning Romanian children in particular.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* The available information is that, since December 1989, 149 Romanian children have been granted entry clearance to come to the United Kingdom with a view to adoption by British couples. Fifteen applications have been refused or withdrawn and 42 applications are currently outstanding, 39 of which have been made since 1 December 1990. Earlier information about Romanian children and information about children from other countries granted entry clearance with a view to adoption in the United Kingdom has not been collected centrally.

Explosives

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration was given to the implications for the financing of appropriate policing when the proposed Control of Explosives Order was drafted.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

This question relates to proposals currently being prepared for the Home Secretary by the Health and Safety Commission.

The financial implications of policing the proposed control of explosives regulations were considered during the preparation of the related cost-benefit analysis. This analysis estimates that the proposed regulations will lead to clear savings for the police.

HEALTH

Breast Care Nurses

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many breast care nurses, and at what grade, are currently in post in each district.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Mental Health Grant

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the potential level of the specific mental health grant to each local authority and give an indication of the take-up proposed at the latest convenient date;

(2) if any local authorities have yet indicated they are unable to take up the offer of the specific mental health grant.

Mr. Dorrell: The indicative allocations for each local authority are set out in circular HC(90)24/LAC(90)10, a copy of which is in the Library. So far, over 70 per cent. of authorities have notified their intention to take up the grant and none has advised us that the grant will not be taken up. We will publish a full list when we have received the outstanding notifications.

AIDS

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what publicity arrangements he has made to inform people of the protection afforded by, and to advise on the proper use of, a safe spermicide combined with condoms as a protection against AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The AIDS public education campaign has adopted a broad-based strategy which offers people clear health educational advice on which to base informed decisions about their sexual behaviour. This includes advice that the use of condoms can reduce the risk of infection with HIV. Clinical studies do not show that spermicides confer additional protection against HIV infection.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what publicity arrangements he has made to inform people of the relative safety of water-based and oil-based lubricants in terms of contraception and as a protection against AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The AIDS public education campaign has, since inception, advocated that where lubricants are used with condoms they should be water-based, and warned that oil-based lubricants may damage or weaken rubber condoms. This advice has been given in leaflets and press advertisements since 1986.

Mental Illness

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much he expects will be transferred from the national health service to Dorset county council for the resettlement of discharged mentally ill patients as a result of the sale of Coldharbour and Herrison hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Neither of the hospitals in question has been sold and the amount of any future transfer will be for the region to discuss with Dorset county council and the district health authorities involved. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Robin Buchanan, the chairman of Wessex regional health authority, for the information he seeks.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number of mental illness hospital beds in each district within the West Midlands regional health authority area by name in the three latest years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 4 February 1991]:* The number of mental illness beds in West Midlands regional health authority is given in the table.

District health authority	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Bromsgrove and Redditch	351	307	229
Herefordshire	186	170	166
Kidderminster and district	77	83	81
Worcester and district	331	302	291
Shropshire	409	410	394
Mid Staffordshire	445	423	386
North Staffordshire	777	727	692
South East Staffordshire	735	732	709
North Warwickshire	30	30	30
South Warwickshire	438	394	365
Central Birmingham	199	198	199
North Birmingham	476	426	417
South Birmingham	361	367	340
West Birmingham	540	520	511
Coventry	277	245	273
Dudley	153	143	197
Sandwell	17	17	57
Solihull	329	313	307
Walsall	14	14	14
Wolverhampton	208	208	205
Total—West Midlands	6,345	6,030	5,862

Source: KHO3

Gulf Casualties

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been issued by his Department to local social services departments concerning contingency plans for the rehabilitation of disabled service men and women injured during the Gulf war.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 5 February at column *154*.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, under Operation Granby, how many health authorities

have been directed to refuse non-emergency admissions to hospitals; how many such refusals have been made to date; if he will make funds available to enable wards and beds closed temporarily and permanently to be reopened, so that non-emergency admissions may be made in addition to any Gulf casualties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: No health authority has been directed to refuse non-emergency admissions to hospitals. The national health service should get sufficient notice of casualties to enable hospitals to cope without emptying beds in advance. It will be for health authorities to decide whether wards not currently operational will need to be reactivated to receive casualties from the Gulf.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 16 January, the Government are providing extra money to meet the full costs of any Gulf casualties. We have told health authorities that they should spend what is necessary and we have given guidance on how to account for and reclaim Gulf costs.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the cancellation of operations by the national health service because of the Gulf crisis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: None. The national health service should get sufficient notice of casualties to enable hospitals to cope without emptying beds or cancelling operations at the present time.

Blood Products

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it costs to collect *(a)* a pint of human blood and *(b)* a donation of plasma.

Mr. Dorrell: The average cost of collecting, processing and transporting a unit of blood in 1989-90 was £29·25. The cost of collecting a donation of plasma is not held centrally.

Patients' Notes

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is satisfied with current arrangements for protecting the confidentiality of patients' notes which may be subject to scrutiny by the family health services authorities.

Mr. Dorrell: Personal health information is strictly confidential. It may be examined only by authorised persons, and only to the extent authorised. The Department is working on draft guidance on the confidentiality of personal health information in the NHS which will be issued for consultation shortly.

Staff Accommodation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives to health authorities on steps to take in order to protect NHS staff resident in hospital accommodation blocks from the risk of fire.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 7 February at column *239*.

NHS Drugs

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist for the return to pharmacies of medicinal drugs prescribed and supplied to national health service patients but not taken.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No formal arrangements exist for the return to pharmacies of unused medicines, but all pharmacies accept such medicines for safe and appropriate destruction.

It is not considered good professional practice to use any medicines where there is uncertainty as to the quality of the medicine.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what would be the estimated net saving to the national health service annually if a system for the return of unused medicinal drugs from nursing homes to pharmacies were established;

(2) what estimate his Department can make of the value of medicinal drugs prescribed and supplied to national health service patients which are not taken.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on which to base such estimates is not available.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department will arrange for the return of prescription medicinal drugs from registered nursing homes to pharmacies when these drugs are not taken by the patient for reasons such as changed prescription, removal to another institution or death, if the packaging is still intact or the nature and origin of the drugs is certified by a qualified person.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The person responsible for a nursing home has a statutory duty to make adequate arrangements for the recording, safe-keeping, handling and disposal of drugs. Health authorities are responsible for ensuring that the statutory requirements are met and must inspect each home at least twice a year.

It is not considered good professional practice to use medicines where there is uncertainty as to the condition under which a medicine has been stored.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners in previous years, in complying with his wishes to move to use computers, applied for a grant for the installation of a computer system that was above the figure of payment set out in the published computer cost reimbursement schedule.

Mr. Dorrell: No figures are held centrally either in respect of individual claims made by GPs or individual amounts reimbursed by family health services authorities.

Social Workers for the Blind

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to assist in the recruitment and training off specialist social workers for the blind.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Recruitment and training of staff are the responsibility of employers. The Department is funding a number of initiatives to enable employers to make most effective use of existing work forces and I have recently announced a training strategy aimed at improving

the supply and training of the personal social services work force at all levels. In addition, we also provide funding specifically for the training of rehabilitation workers with the blind.

NHS Spending

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* total NHS spending and *(b)* hospital and community health services spending as a proportion of real national disposable income in each year since 1987-88.

Mr. Dorrell *[pursuant to the reply 28 January, column 433]:* I have subsequently been advised that the term "real national disposable income" does appear in the national accounts. The cash figures that underlie this series are the gross national disposable income (GNDI) figures and the following table gives gross NHS and HCHS spending in the United Kingdom as a proportion of GNDI for the years 1987-88 to 1989-90.

Gross expenditure as a proportion of Gross National Disposable Income

Financial Year	*NHS Total*	*[1]HCHS Total*
1987-88	5·1	3·8
1988-89	5·0	3·8
1989-90	5·0	3·8

Source: CSO.

[1]New definition of HCHS expenditure which was used in the Departmental Report. Includes Family Health Services Authority administration, Disablement Services Authority and Family Health Service cash-limited spending.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

15. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our relations with Iraq are bad.

The Gulf

17. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to pay an early visit to the Gulf to discuss the crisis with Governments of Gulf states.

29. **Mr Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit Saudi Arabia to discuss the Gulf war with the Emir of Kuwait; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I visited Egypt and Saudi Arabia last week, and also called on the Emir of Kuwait in Ta'if. I was greatly encouraged by the resolve and determination of these important members of the coalition.

22. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Arab League states about the further exploration of diplomatic solutions to the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Discussions with members of the union of Maghreb nations and of the Arab League continue. We all agree on the need to end the conflict as early as possible on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. But a diplomatic solution can be possible only once Saddam Hussein is willing to comply with the Security Council resolutions.

23. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made with our European partners on burden-sharing in connection with the United Kingdom costs of the war in the Gulf.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in touch with a number of countries, including European partners, who may be willing to contribute to our costs. Germany has agreed to provide a cash sum of £275 million. This is in addition to practical assistance which the Germans and other partners have already made available in support of British deployments to the Gulf.

24. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to peace proposals from Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iranian Government are reported to have put forward to Iraq certain suggestions for achieving a peaceful solution to the current crisis. The details have not been disclosed, but we would support any proposal based on a complete Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and full compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

26. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest Gulf position.

30. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments in the Gulf.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The allied coalition remains united and steadfast in its determination to prosecute the military campaign until we know that all Iraqi forces are out of Kuwait. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary found complete agreement on this during his recent visit to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. We do not want the conflict to continue a day longer than necessary. But even as recently as 48 hours ago Baghdad radio announced that

"Iraq will never cease fighting until total victory is achieved."

In the light of this sustained Iraqi belligerence it would be irresponsible for the Governments of the allied coalition to agree to a ceasefire, or a pause in hostilities, while our troops are engaged and exposed. None the less, we continue to hope that the Iraqi leadership will see sense and, as a first step, make an unequivocal commitment to withdraw from Kuwait accompanied by concrete steps towards full compliance with UN Security Council resolutions.

28. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the creation of a stable framework for lasting peace and security in the Gulf.

31. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the creation of a stable security framework in the Gulf.

36. **Sir Marcus Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the consideration being given to peace and security in the middle east after the present hostilities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It must be for the Gulf states and others in the region to decide future arrangements for peace and security once hostilities have ended. We are ready to play our part, if asked to do so, in support of those arrangements.

32. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made with other countries on burden sharing with United Kingdom costs of the conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We continue to have discussions with a number of countries which may be willing to contribute to our costs. Generous cash contributions have been pledged by Kuwait, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and Hong Kong totalling £1·2 billion.

33. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the non-military assistance being provided by European and other countries in respect of the allied efforts in the present Gulf conflict.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Considerable non-military assistance is being provided by European and other countries to the multinational force in the Gulf, mainly in the form of financial backing or medical and other logistical support. We are still in discussion with a number of countries which have not contributed directly to the military effort, but which may be willing to help defray our costs.

Soviet Union

19. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit the Soviet Union to discuss United Kingdom-Soviet relations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State attaches importance to maintaining a dialogue with the Soviet Government. Dates for his next visit to the Soviet Union have not yet been fixed.

38. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Soviet ambassador to discuss United Kingdom-Soviet relations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British-Soviet relations were among the subjects discussed when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State saw the Soviet ambassador on 31 January.

Drugs

20. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British participation in the international fight against drugs.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We give high priority to combating drugs problems. We welcome the recent appointment of Mr. Giacomelli to head the new United Nations international drug control programme and will continue to work vigorously with the United Nations, in the European Community, with the Council of Europe's Pompidou group and through bilateral assistance programmes in the international fight against drugs.

Cyprus

21. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the high commissioner of the republic of Cyprus to discuss United Nations resolutions on Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last met the Cyprus high commissioner formally on 1 November. He called on me on 15 November.

British-American Relations

25. **Mr. Churchill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the United States Secretary of State to discuss British-American relations.

Mr. Hurd: I am often in touch with Secretary Baker and hope to meet him again within the next few weeks.

Dalai Lama

27. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is proposing to meet the Dalai Lama of Tibet when he visits Britain next month.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Guatemala

34. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet representatives of the Government of Guatemala.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend have any present plans to meet representatives of the Guatemalan Government. Developments in the Gulf obliged me to abandon plans to attend the inauguration of President Serrano on 14 January. I look forward to visiting Guatemala when I can.

East Timor

35. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the current situation in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to promote contacts between the Indonesian and Portuguese Governments aimed at achieving a settlement which reflects the interests of the people of East Timor.

International Criminal Court

37. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate discussions with the United Nations with a view to establishing an international criminal court.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The question of establishing an international criminal court is already under consideration at the United Nations in connection with the draft code of crimes against the peace and security of mankind. The United Kingdom participates in these discussions, most recently in November 1990.

Colombia

39. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Colombia about human rights.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Human rights were discussed during the visit to London of the then President Barco in April 1990. We take every suitable opportunity to register our deep concerns about human rights in Colombia. We welcome President Gaviria's commitment to uphold them.

Mr. Dimitri Birman

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Soviet authorities regarding the case of Dimitri Birman who has been refused permission to emigrate to Israel.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Her Majesty's embassy in Moscow has made representations to the Soviet Foreign Ministry about the case of Dimitri Birman, and we shall continue to follow it closely.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the principal achievements of his Department since June 1987.

Mr. Hurd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Her Majesty's representatives overseas have protected and promoted British interests and pursued the Government's overseas objectives.

The United Kingdom has played a prominent part in bringing about constructive change in Europe. With other western partners we have promoted democracy and human rights in eastern Europe, a policy pursued over many years which has at last borne fruit. To help the further progress of eastern European countries the FCO is managing a programme of assistance—the know-how fund. The Government have joined others in setting up the European bank for reconstruction and development, whose headquarters will be in London.

The FCO played a leading part in the negotiations which completed the unification of Germany and the restoration of its sovereignty, a longstanding objective of British policy.

The United Kingdom contributed to the conclusion of a treaty on conventional forces in Europe which, if implemented, will enhance stability in Europe. This treaty, the charter of Paris, which was agreed at the summit meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the NATO London declaration, form the foundation of a Europe with greater freedom and security for all.

In the European Community, the FCO has worked with other Government Departments for:

completion of the single market (70 per cent. of legislation agreed);

reform of the common agricultural policy, including the 1988 budget decision;

strengthening European political co-operation; and

a co-ordinated EC contribution to eastern Europe.

The United Kingdom has made a substantial contribution to change in South Africa where the release of Nelson Mandela and the opening of direct talks between the South African Government and the ANC are important achievements. We help black communities in South Africa.

At the United Nations the United Kingdom has contributed to the adoption of resolution 598 which led to the ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq conflict. We supported the United Nations's negotiations which brought Namibia peacefully to independence.

The United Kingdom played an important part in securing a prompt, firm and united response by the United Nations Security Council to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and joined our partners in the international coalition in action to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait in pursuit of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The United Kingdom has been at the forefront of international co-operation to combat drug trafficking and to protect the environment.

The Overseas Development Administration of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has maintained a substantial aid programme. Gross public expenditure on overseas aid in the period 1987-89 totalled £4·75 billion. Priorities include supporting economic reforms, promoting good government, and reversing environmental degradation. About 80 per cent. of our bilateral aid has been allocated to the poorer countries. We have taken the lead in promoting measures to reduce the debt burden of poorer countries. We have responded swiftly to appeals for emergency aid—over £100 million from 1987-89.

The assistance provided to business men by Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff overseas (nearly one third of whom are engaged in trade promotion work) has contributed to export sales by small, medium and major United Kingdom companies.

Consuls and honorary consuls have provided assistance to an increasing number of British nationals travelling and living overseas. During the latter part of 1990 our embassies in Baghdad and Kuwait helped with the evacuation to the United Kingdom of 1,796 people.

European Political Union

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's attitude towards the inter govermental conference on political union in the light of the Gulf conflict.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The 4 February meeting of the intergovernmental conference on political union discussed proposals for a common foreign and security policy. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and others emphasised the need to take account of the Twelve's response to the Gulf crisis. Foreign Ministers will return to this subject at subsequent meetings of the IGC.

Human Rights

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made at the current session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As observers at this year's Commission on Human Rights, our delegation is playing an active part in its work. I visited Geneva on 4-5 February and gave a speech to the commission, a copy of which is being placed in the Library of the House. We shall continue our efforts in the remaining weeks of the commission and beyond to promote respect for fundamental human rights and to urge compliance by all states with their international obligations in this field.

Western Sahara

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Morocco on the question of independence for western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have remained strictly impartial in this dispute. However, as one of the permanent members of the Security Council, we have consistently supported the United Nations Secretary General's efforts to arrange a free and fair referendum to determine the territory's future.

Value-for-Money Exercise

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* target and *(b)* progress as at 31 December 1990 of the value-for-money exercise in respect of (i) consular work, (ii) information work, (iii) cultural work, (iv) commercial work, (v) overseas accommodation and (vi) non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* The following progress had been made by the FCO by 31 December 1990 in meeting the value-for-money targets set for financial year 1990-91.

Target	*Progress*
(i) *Consular Work*	
(a) To deal with the greater demand for consular services arising from the 6 per cent. increase in the number of British nationals travelling overseas within existing resources.	The greater volume of travellers to 31 December 1990 was dealt with within overall existing resources.
(b) To increase interest in, and usage of, public education television and radio fillers; to achieve free broadcast at airtime value of £1 million; and in 1990-91 to target our public information campaign more closely towards those travellers identified as being the major cause of the avoidable consular workload.	Efforts to achieve the £1 million figure by year end continue. The targetting of the information campaign has been achieved through issuing a leaflet with all British visitors' passports since October 1990, and is ongoing for 1991.
(c) To complete, by the end of 1990-91, a phased programme for the issue at overseas posts of passports in the European Community common format without any overall increase in existing staffing levels, while at the same time coping with a forecast increase in the number of passport applications.	Under the above programme, the nine largest passport issuing posts overseas are to be equipped for the computerised issue of passports in the European Community common format. By 31 December 1990, five of these posts were operating the new system. Two more will be equipped before the end of the current financial year: the remaining two posts will be converted to the new system during financial year 1991-92. On the basis of information currently available, it is expected that the programme will be completed within existing staffing levels.
(ii) *Information Work*	
(a) To improve the speed of delivery of ministerial statements and other verbatim material to overseas posts, while reducing annual costs by £135,000.	Project scheduled for completion on 1 July 1991.
(b) To improve the effectiveness of other information services (eg through better targetting on foreign policy objectives) without increasing costs.	Improved systems established for the management of publications, including tighter ordering procedures, more consistency of presentation and better quality control. Savings on television production and exhibitions have been achieved by recruiting specialists and contracting out less work, eg a 40 per cent. saving on the cost of a new film about the workings of Parliament. Efficiency savings achieved to date—£126,500.
(iii) *Cultural Work*	
(a) To increase the number of FCOSAS awards jointly funded with United Kingdom institutions, private trusts, private sector and other partners from 156 in 1988-89 to 275 in 1990-91.	Evidence at 31 December 1990 suggested that 475 such awards would be made in 1990-91.

Target	Progress
(iv) *Commercial Work*	
(a) At existing levels of manpower resources, to improve further the targetting and quality of Posts' services to exporters, monitored through the Quality Measurement System and the charging mechanism, and to increase further the quantity and quality of reporting of export opportunities.	Good progress has been made. Commercial Sections' work overseas, and the deployment of resources, are now guided and directed by the BOTB Forward Plan. The monitoring carried out under the Quality Measurement System has revealed that, over the last 15 months, customers' perception of the extent to which their needs were being met remained positive. The overall satisfaction rates for information, advice and promotion services, were consistently high during 1990.
(b) To ensure better focussed and targetted output by Commercial Sections overseas directed towards the targets and priorities set out in the BOTB Forward Plan.	High customer satisfaction borne out by demand for chargeable services, eg sales of market information enquiries increased by over 60 per cent. during the period April-November 1990; over 90 per cent. of the companies contacted would use the services again.
(v) *Overseas Accommodation*	
(a) To reduce running costs on the overseas estate by £500,000 in 1990-91 by asset recycling.	Performance at 31 December 1990 suggests target of £500,000 will be met or exceeded.
(b) To reduce the level of furnishing stocks by 15 per cent. in the course of the 1990-91; and to achieve a saving in storage charges of £100,000.	Furnishing stock levels at 31 December 1990 indicated that the target will be achieved; that for savings on storage charges has already been met.
(c) To achieve 5 per cent. saving on cost of furnishings by direct purchase.	The FCO is currently in negotiation with a large number of contractors: but it is expected the £250,000 target will be met.
(d) To achieve savings on consultancy services, construction contracts and the purchase of goods of £250,000.	£250,000 savings figure had been achieved by 31 December 1990.
(vi) *NGOS*	
British Council	
(a) To reduce costs of the English language testing service by 55 per cent. between 1987-88 and 1991-92.	The target had been achieved by 31 December 1990. Total global surplus of £170,000 obtained in 1989-90. Forecast surplus for 1990-91 is £120,000.
(b) To reduce by 1993-94 annual global costs of provision of information to outside enquirers by 15 per cent. of the 1988-89 expenditure figure.	On target. Costs were reduced by £150,000 in 1989-90.
(c) To reduce telephone, telex and fax expenditure at headquarters by 5 per cent. per annum between 1989-90 and 1991-92.	Ahead of target. Reduction of 12 per cent. achieved in 1989-90; reduction of 10 per cent. forecast for 1990-91. Savings of £80,000 were produced in 1989-90.
(vii) *Commonwealth Secretariat*	
(a) To find during 1991, in co-operation with other member governments of the Commonwealth, a cost effective solution to the Commonwealth Secretariat's accommodation problem and to press for an improved budgetting and management system for the Secretariat.	The Commonwealth Senior Officials' Meeting in November 1990 authorised the Secretariat to continue negotiations for the purchase of a second HQ building to accommodate their overspill staff. The meeting also introduced new programme budgetting procedures.
BBC World Service	
(a) The BBC World Service has a number of performance measures and targets relating to efficiency, economy and effectiveness.	As at 31 December 1990, the BBC World Service was on course to meet all its targets for 1990-91 by 31 March 1991.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 1991 at column *504* to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), if he will give the names and size of the ships chartered by Her Majesty's Government for use in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Although some information has been given in the past, in view of the current terrorist threat and the possibility of reprisals against those shipping companies willing to carry out work in support of British forces in the Gulf, I do not believe it would be prudent to provide further details. To date a total of 130 vessels have been chartered by Her Majesty's Government for use in the Gulf, of which seven have been British flagged.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his statement of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns 1108 and 1114, if he will now give consideration to the provision of call-time-limited free phone calls to the United Kingdom and Germany for service personnel in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We believe that the concession announced by my right hon. Friend on 31 January is the

most equitable means of subsidising telephone calls made from the Gulf by service personnel. Cable and Wireless has recently announced a complementary scheme which aims to provide 100,000 £10 phone cards free over a two to three-month period.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Leisure Facilities

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much grant aid has been given towards the capital cost of district council recreation or leisure centres in each of the past 10 years; and if he will specify the council to which each grant was given.

Dr. Mawhinney: Grants by the Department of Education have been made as follows:

Grant paid—Leisure/Recreation Centres

Council	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*Total*
Antrim	—	—	—	—	—	56,348	50,399	4,769	—	—	111,516
Ards	—	607	7,073	157,704	200,810	814,810	129,014	543,319	20,105	7,646	1,881,088
Armagh	—	—	—	—	63,069	349,485	5,154	—	—	—	417,708
Ballymena	2,386	91,793	494,344	133,965	262,121	—	20,257	—	45,522	—	1,050,388
Ballymoney	674,434	449,326	200,855	343	3,522	1,232	2,589	56,250	20,537	—	1,409,088
Banbridge	53,739	10,092	3,329	1,836	10,755	60,385	—	608	—	—	140,744
Belfast	1,004,949	2,252,944	3,164,971	1,666,133	648,768	96,307	134,652	74,162	80,641	—	9,123,527
Carrickfergus	20,190	684	—	—	110,742	45,754	9,000	—	—	—	186,370
Castlereagh (Swimming pool only)	57,382	70,962	2,822	18,193	47,648	29,437	—	3,187	9,524	—	239,155
Cookstown	—	—	19,806	—	18,652	390,275	266,570	89,712	52,080	—	837,095
Coleraine	—	—	—	—	—	14,644	2,318	456	18,129	25,145	60,692
Craigavon	53,616	27,903	456	12,774	—	—	—	7,065	—	—	101,814
Down	—	67,940	287,704	187,423	139,810	73,665	186,959	7,830	3,222	1,588	956,141
Derry	51,719	73,479	24,648	48,015	3,481	1,681	—	14,942	7,748	5,562	231,275
Dungannon (Swimming pool only)	—	—	—	16,881	9,675	—	1,750	—	—	—	28,306
Fermanagh	3,144	—	80,878	—	7,819	—	—	—	—	—	91,841
Larne (Swimming pool only)	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,956	435	981	—	4,372
Limavady	120,020	17,316	64,909	—	15,357	12,504	2,799	—	—	—	232,905
Lisburn	—	—	89,644	311,981	476,337	168,002	60,748	11,557	43,005	61,376	1,222,650
Magherafelt	119,916	228,065	40,208	90,795	76,126	113,992	8,879	16,542	27,859	6,423	728,805
Moyle	—	—	109,972	91,546	93,039	1,833	—	855	—	—	297,245
Newry/Mourne	72,311	93,689	297,573	243,595	50,832	29,275	296,173	173,482	61,921	13,998	1,332,849
Newtownabbey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	19,366	—	—	19,366
North Down	317,600	135,580	83,353	22,172	—	—	19,854	—	—	—	578,559
Omagh	397,476	351,497	319,543	1,651	7,040	21,838	18,381	25,515	1,458	3,861	1,148,260
Strabane	1,973	—	—	—	449,413	171,073	—	—	15,243	65,435	703,137
Total	2,950,855	3,871,877	5,292,088	3,005,007	2,695,016	2,452,540	1,218,452	1,050,052	407,975	191,034	23,134,896

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funds are available to assist district councils with the capital cost of leisure centre construction; and if he will make it his policy to fund those councils which have proceeded with schemes ahead of receiving grant aid.

Dr. Mawhinney: The funds made available by Government are determined from year to year in relation to the overall priorities of the Department of Education. In the current financial year funds have been made available to allow a start to be made on a sports hall facility at Dungannon.

Expenditure incurred by district councils which has not been approved by the Department of Education is not grant-aided retrospectively. It is not proposed to change this policy.

Councils may also apply for EC funding in support of capital development.

EC Funding

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much European Community funding has been granted to each Northern Ireland district council; and if he will list the schemes and show from which European Community fund the grant was made.

Mr. Needham: I have arranged for the information requested by the hon. Gentleman to be placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Adjudicated Decisions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the relationship between information on adjudicated decisions contained in the chief adjudication officer's quarterly reports and clerical returns; and whether the series are compatible.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Social Security Act 1989

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research his Department is undertaking or has commissioned concerning the Social Security Act 1989; and when he expects the research to be published.

Mr. Jackson: My Department is presently undertaking research on the implementation of the actively seeking employment condition for benefit entitlement. A study on the perception of employers to this condition has also been commissioned from the Institute for Manpower Studies. It is not possible at this time to provide an indication of the timing of any publication.

SCOTLAND

Artistic Institutions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the projects funded by his Department to help *(a)* musical, *(b)* theatre and *(c)* other artistic institutions and organisations in Scotland to make their activities easily available to low-income Scottish people.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The following projects, funded under the urban programme, aim to improve access to, and involvement in, the arts by communities in the worst deprived urban areas in Scotland.

(a) Music
Music Project—Inverclyde
C Sharp Music Factory—Castlemilk

(b) Theatre
West Lothian Youth Theatre—Livingston
Barlanark Theatre Workshop
Enterprise Theatre—Govan
Garthamlock Visual Statement
St. Andrew's High School Theatre—Clydebank

(c) Other
Craigmillar Arts Project
Community Arts Programme—Ardrossan
Garnock Valley Arts Resource Centre—Glengarnock
Maryhill Arts Project
Forum Arts Centre—Townhead
Community Arts Project—Motherwell
Community Arts Team—Dundee
Falkirk Community Arts Project
Glasgow 1990—Arts Co-ordinator
Business and the Arts—Govan
Castlemilk Community Arts/Cultural Development
Slide Workshop (Magic Lantern Van)—Edinburgh
Springburn Museum and Exhibition Centre
The Dundee Dance Factory
Stanley Community Arts Project—Ardrossan
Beechwood Integrated Arts Project—Renfrew
Gear Community Arts Project—Glasgow
Gorbals Community Arts and Leisure Programme

Training

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much money he intends to invest in Monklands for the purpose of job creation and training in 1991 to 1994;

(2) how much the Training Agency plans to invest in Lanarkshire in 1991 to 1994;

(3) how much money he intends to invest in Strathkelvin for the purpose of job creation and training in 1991 to 1994;

(4) how much the Training Agency plans to invest in Dumbartonshire in 1991 to 1994;

(5) what specific resources have been allocated by the Scottish Development Agency to Lanarkshire for the years 1991 to 1995.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In Scotland from 1 April 1991 Government resources for investment in economic development leading to the creation of jobs and for training will be devolved to Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, working in conjunction with the local enterprise companies. These organisations will decide where such resources are to be invested. Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are the successor bodies to the Training Agency and to the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board.

Decisions about the allocation of resources for Lanarkshire and, within that area, for Monklands will be taken by Scottish Enterprise in conjunction with the relevant local enterprise company, Lanarkshire development agency. Similarly, such decisions in relation to Dumbartonshire and, within that area, Strathkelvin will be taken by Scottish Enterprise in conjunction with Dumbartonshire Enterprise Company.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision there is under the Scottish Enterprise legislation for each local enterprise company to collate monthly figures on unemployment in their areas.

Mr. Allan Stewart: None. The collation of unemployment figures remains the responsibility of the Employment Department.

Housing

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of eligible homes in Scotland currently have *(a)* cavity wall insulation, *(b)* 150mm of loft insulation, *(c)* thermostats on 50 per cent. or more radiator valves, *(d)* double glazing on 50 per cent. or more external windows, *(e)* compact fluorescent lighting in 50 per cent. or more light fittings, *(f)* gas condensing boilers and *(g)* floor insulation; and by when he forecasts that each of these figures will reach 75 per cent. and 90 per cent. of the eligible market.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Blood Products

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration the Medicines Control Agency is giving to licensing the process made available to the Scottish national blood transfusion service to produce a higher potency factor VIII for the rest of the commercial plasma fractionation/supply industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Matters relating to the Medicines Control Agency are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

An application for a licence for the production of higher potency factor VIII has not yet been submitted to the agency by the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service, but it will do so soon. The intention is to produce a supply to meet the needs of Scottish patients.

Sports and Recreation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the financial support given by his office to local authorities and schools to meet the needs of *(a)* physical education and *(b)* recreation in schools and communities in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Central Government support for local authority expenditure is not hypothecated to individual services.

GP Services

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of achievement against the targets set for childhood immunisation and cervical screening for each area of general practice as defined by the Jarman index.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. However, data are available on the proportions of general medical practitioners in each health board area achieving the target levels for childhood immunisation and cervical screening; and this information as at 1 April 1990 is published in "Health Briefing No. 91/01/STA", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Health Boards

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of the new members of Grampian health board to serve from 1 April.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the non-executive members of the new health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The names of those appointed as non-executive members of health boards with effect from 1 April 1991 are listed with their area of residence.

Appointments	*Residence*
Argyll and Clyde health board	
Mr. N. M. Faccenda	Connel
Mrs. M. A. Foggie	Greenock
Mrs. E. S. Lander	Kilmacolm
Dr. J. Moffat	Greenock
Mr. C. H. Parker	Kilmacolm
Mrs. J. C. Le Roux	Dunoon
Ayrshire and Arran health board	
Mr. J. Cahill	Seamill
Mr. J. W. G. Donaldson	Isle of Arran
Mrs. A. Dunbar	Saltcoats
Dr. K. G. Fegan	West Kibride
Mr. W. M. Richie	Kirkoswald
Mr. I. B. Valentine	Ayr
Borders health board	
Dr. D. W. Cameron MBE	Hawick
Mr. D. A. G. Kilshaw	Melrose
Miss M. C. M. Marshall	Lauder
Mr. J. P. Metcalfe	Hawick
Lady F. E. Sanderson	Melrose
Mr. R. A. Stewart	Galashiels
Dumfries and Galloway health board	
Mrs. V. M. I. Jardine-Paterson	Lockerbie
Mr. H. S. McFadzean	Port William
Mr. W. Seright	Dumfries
Mrs. J. D. Tulloch	Lockerbie
Dr. A. P. D. Wilkinson	Castle Douglas
Mr. W. I. Wilson	Stranraer
Fife health board	
Mrs. S. L. Aitken	Wormit
Dr. A. C. A. Alexander	Dunfermline
Mr. F. J. R. Craig	Gateside
Dr. C. G. Ingram	St. Andrews
Mrs. M. Steedman OBE	Cupar
Mr. G. M. Thomson	Perth
Forth Valley health board	
Mr. E. T. M. Bell-Scott	Muckhart
Mr. K. Harding	Dunblane
Dr. G. B. Hastings	Bridge of Allan
Mr. P. A. Joynson	Stirling
Mrs. K. A. Smith	Killearn, Glasgow
Mr. C. S. R. Stroyan	Bridgend of Teith
Grampian health board	
Mr. A. B. Broomfield	Aberdeen
Dr. C. A. MacLeod	Aberdeen
Professor D. Ogston	Aberdeen
Mr. J. A. Snedden	Elgin
Mr. N. Thornton-Kemsley, CBE	Laurencekirk
Mrs. J. G. A. Wisely, JP	Aberdeen
Greater Glasgow health board	
Rev. R. D. M. Campbell	Newton Mearns
Mrs. A. Gilchrist	Newton Mearns
Lady S. Goold	Clarkston
Mr. P. W. Holst	Glasgow
Professor R. M. Mackie	Bearsden
Mr. A. Scobbie	Bearsden
Highland health board	
Mr. J. G. Ligertwood	Inverness
Mr. D. J. Mackay	Beauly
Mrs. A. Macpherson	Conon Bridge
Mr. C. Neilson, JP	Fort William
Mrs. S. G. H. Stone	Tain
Mrs. C. Thomson	Inverness
Lanarkshire health board	
Dr. W. R. Criggie	Lanark
Mrs. A. S. Hinshalwood	Strathhaven
Mr. I. L. Livingstone	Motherwell
Mr. R. J. Logan, MBE, JP	Carnwarth
Mr. J. P. Robison, JP	Lanark
Mr. J. Thomson, MBE	Motherwell
Lothian health board	
Professor R. C. B. Aitken	Edinburgh
Mrs. G. Barton	Edinburgh
Mr. J. A. Campbell	Edinburgh
Mr. R. Findlay	Edinburgh
Mrs. M. B. M. Knox	Edinburgh
Mr. G. S. Millar	Edinburgh
Orkney health board	
Mr. J. Flett	Kirkwall
Captain M. Gunn	Stromness
Mr. E. M. Gibson, MBE	Kirkwall
Mrs. E. B. Kerr	Stromness
Mr. J. Rendall	Papa Westray
Dr. J. S. Walker	Kirkwall
Shetland health board	
Mr. R. R. Bentley	Virkie
Mrs. M. U. Colligan	Voe
Sqn. Ldr. B. P. Gregson	Unst
Dr. M. D. Hunter	Levenwick
Mr. R. L. Johnson	Lerwick
Miss A. I. Manson	Brae
Tayside health board	
Rev. K. Campbell	Barnhill
Mr. D. W. M. Davidson, JP	Blairgowrie
Mrs. S. H. Fallon	Inchture
Rt. Rev. L. E. Luscombe	Kirkton of Tealing
Professor R. E. Olver	St. Andrews
Western Isles health board	
Mr. J. H. Downie	Isle of Harris
Mrs. C. R. Macaskill	North Uist
Mr. A. Matheson	Stornoway
Mr. I. D. MacIver	Stornaway

Cereals

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farms produce cereals; and how many of these farms produce less than 75 acres of cereals per annum.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The June 1990 main agricultural census recorded that 13,208 farms in Scotland were growing cereals. Of those 8,273 were growing less than 30·3 hectares (75 acres) of cereals.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of pupils on the roll of each school involved in the assisted places schemes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the table:

School	*Total roll at September 1990*
Aberlour House School, Moray	133
Albyn School for Girls, Aberdeen	470
Ardvreck School, Crieff	151
Beaconhurst Grange School, Bridge of Allan	229
Belhaven Hill School, Dunbar	80
Belmont House School, Newton Mearns	379
Blairmore School, Huntly	80
Butterstone House School, Dunkeld	54
Cargilfield School, Edinburgh	182
Clifton Hall School, Midlothian	106
Craigclowan Preparatory School, Perth	207
Craigholme School for Girls, Glasgow	544
Crawfordton House School, Dumfriesshire	80
Croftinloan School, Pitlochry	98
Daniel Stewart's and Melville College, Edinburgh	1,886
The Mary Erskine School, Edinburgh	560
Dollar Academy	1,132
Drumley House School, Ayrshire	126
Edinburgh Academy	919
Fernhill School, Glasgow	305
Fettes College, Edinburgh	429
Fort Augustus Abbey School	62
George Heriot's School, Edinburgh	1,452
George Watson's College, Edinburgh	2,094
Glasgow Academy	773
Glenalmond College, Perthshire	309
Gordonstoun School, Morayshire	476
Hamilton College	719
The High School of Dundee	1,143
The High School of Glasgow	946
Hutchesons' Grammar School, Glasgow	1,666
Keil School, Dumbarton	211
Kelvinside Academy, Glasgow	640
Kilgraston School, Perthshire	274
Kilquhanity House School, Castle Douglas	50
Lathallan School, Montrose	66
Laurel Bank School, Glasgow	396
Lomond School, Helensburgh	551
Loretto School, Musselburgh	391
Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh	374
Morrison's Academy, Crieff	761
New Park School, St. Andrews	115
Oxenfoord Castle School, Midlothian	90
Park School, Glasgow	361
Park Lodge School, Helensburgh	100
Rannoch School, Perthshire	291
Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen	1,173
Rudolf Steiner School of Edinburgh	287
St. Aloysius' College, Glasgow	1,075
St. Columba's School, Kilmacolm	551
St. Denis and Cranley School, Edinburgh	210
St. George's School for Girls, Edinburgh	843
St. Leonard's School, St. Andrews	378
St. Margaret's School for Girls, Aberdeen	399
St. Margaret's School for Girls, Edinburgh	796
St. Mary's School, Melrose	80
Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perthshire	533
Wellington School, Ayr	449
Westbourne, Glasgow	302

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of the equipment stolen from his Department in the last three years for which information is available; and what was the approximate value of each item.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* A variety of minor items are periodically reported missing. The following more substantial items have been formally recorded since 1988 as losses to the Scottish Office which are attributable to theft.

Year	*Item*	*Approximate value* £
1988	Cash	400
1989	Motor car	2,000
1989	Furniture/machinery	3,800

SOCIAL SECURITY

Care

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is *(a)* the payment per resident from his Department to private nursing and or care homes and *(b)* the public expenditure per resident in local council care.

Miss Widdecombe: At May 1990, the latest date for which complete figures are available, the estimated average annual payment of income support to people in residential care and nursing homes was £6,719 per year.

Information regarding amounts of other social security benefits paid to people in residential care and nursing homes and information regarding amounts of any social security benefits paid to people in local authority residential accommodation is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that the available figures show that in 1988-89, the gross annual expenditure by local social service departments on residential care (excluding nursing home care) per supported resident aged 65 and over was £8,788. The net annual local authority expenditure was £5,980. The difference between gross and net is due to fees and charges, most of which are paid out of social security benefits.

War Pensions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security where the full terms of the war pensions scheme are available; and if he will summarise them.

Miss Widdecombe: The full terms of the war pensions scheme are to be found in the Department's publication "War Pensions. The Statutes, Regulations, Rules and Orders as now in Force" a copy of which is available in the Library. The scheme provides for pensions where the disablement or death of a member of the armed forces is due to service; there are similar provisions for other groups such as members of the Merchant Navy. Allied provisions for members of the armed forces form part of the occupational pension scheme which is administered by the Ministry of Defence.

Pregnancy

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps he takes to monitor the financial, housing or social circumstances of pregnant girls aged under 18 years in the light of the higher risks faced by them and their babies;

(2) if he is monitoring the applications for income support made by pregnant girls under 18 years old; and if he will now make it his practice to grant such applications during the winter without any further requirements of severe hardship;

(3) how many pregnant girls under 18 years old and in the first six months of their pregnancy are receiving income support due to severe hardship; and what proportions of such applications are currently being granted.

Mr. Jack: All pregnant girls aged 16 or 17 years of age can get income support under normal rules for the 11 weeks prior to, and for six weeks after, their confinement. During the earlier stage of pregnancy they can get income support if they are incapable of work, but the remainder are guaranteed the offer of a youth training place. For those on youth training, training allowance replaces income support. The Secretary of State for Employment has taken measures to ease access to appropriate youth training provision for pregnant girls, the aim of which is to provide training relevant to their needs.

The severe hardship provisions within income support provide the necessary discretion to enable sensitive handling of such cases and for financial, housing and social circumstances to be taken into account, and there are no plans for making seasonal adjustments to the rules. Between 5 January 1991 and 8 February 1991, of 218 claims for income support by pregnant girls 162 (74 per cent.) were in need of income support under the severe hardship provisions.

Mobility Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the method by which his Department calculates the cost of extending entitlements to the mobility component to those aged over 65 years.

Mr. Scott: The estimate of the cost of extending entitlement to the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance to those over 65 was produced by looking at the numbers of people identified by OPCS who were over the age of 65 and not already getting mobility allowance who would meet the current qualifying conditions for mobility allowance were the age limit to be removed.

Therapeutic Work

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* invalidity benefit and *(b)* severe disablement allowance are taking advantage of the therapeutic earnings provisions; and what is the average weekly amount earned in both cases.

Mr. Scott: Information on the number of people claiming an incapacity benefit and receiving earnings for therapeutic work is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Similarly, information on the level of payment received is not collected centrally.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of persons within the Doncaster metropolitan borough area who are in receipt of attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Support

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he has issued any additional guidance to his Department's offices in relation to making income support available to under 18-year-olds in view of the exceptionally cold weather;

(2) what monitoring he is undertaking of the number of applications made, and applications granted, for income support for under 18-year-olds due to severe hardship in the current exceptionally cold weather; and what figures he has collected.

Mr. Jack: All claims to income support from young people under 18 years of age which are not successful under normal rules are automatically referred for sympathetic consideration under the severe hardship provisions. All such claimants are automatically interviewed by staff who have been trained to recognise the needs of these particularly vulnerable young people. No further guidance was, therefore, necessary to cater for the exceptionally cold weather.

During the week commencing 4 February, 866 claims to income support were received from young people and directions for payment were made in 647 (75 per cent.) of them.

Social Fund

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund loan applications were refused in each of his two Department's offices at Greenock and Port Glasgow in *(a)* 1989-90 and *(b)* 1990 to date due to perceived inability to repay; and what advice was given to those experiencing such a refusal.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 6 February 1991]*: The table shows the number of applications recorded as refused on grounds of inability to repay. All letters notifying decisions advise applicants of their right to ask for a review and refer to the citizens advice bureau or a local law centre as a

source of general advice. Money advice is normally offered to applicants discovered to be in financial difficulties, including such cases where an applicant is refused because of a perceived inability to repay.

	1989-90	*1990 to December 1990*
Greenock	89	136
Port Glasgow	111	144

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 February 1991

PRIME MINISTER

The Gulf

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what communications he has had with King Hussein of Jordan since 6 February concerning the situation in the Gulf.

The Prime Minister: We are in continuing contact with the Jordanian Government. We have made clear our regret at King Hussein's misleading description of coalition objectives and activities in his 6 February speech to his people. I last communicated directly with King Hussein on 3 January, when I met him in London.

Saddam Hussein

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister who was the last Minister to meet President Saddam Hussein; and what matters were discussed.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, met President Saddam Hussein on 24 February 1988. A number of regional and bilateral issues were discussed.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Central and South America

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* economic, *(b)* scientific, *(c)* technical, *(d)* environmental, and *(e)* social programmes which Her Majesty's Government have supported since 1989 in (i) Argentina, (ii) Brazil, (iii) Chile, (iv) Colombia, (v) Mexico, (vi) Panama, (vii) Peru, (viii) Venezuela and (ix) Uruguay.

Mrs. Chalker: I have been asked to reply.

We have no bilateral aid programmes for Argentina or Venezuela. We have technical co-operation programmes of varying sizes in the other seven countries. All these programmes concentrate on renewable natural resources (with a special emphasis on the sustainable use of the environment), English language teaching, and post-graduate training in Britain. Since July 1989 we have been building up a specifically environmental programme in Brazil.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Community Charge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) on 28 January, *Official Report*, column *391*, if he will publish the uprated tables on transitional grants referred to in his answer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: These tables have now been published as tables 5.2 and 5.4 of the "Public Expenditure Analyses to 1993-94, Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement"—Cm 1520.

The changes as a result of the new community charge reduction scheme announced on 17 January were not included in these tables and are as follows:

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Great Britain*
Community charge reduction scheme 1991-92 (£ million)	1,695	90	62	1,847

These figures replace those for transitional relief given in the published tables.

Funding for the new scheme results in offsetting savings of some £300 million on community charge benefit.

Bingo Duty

Mr. Alexander To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newark of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *466*, how much of the £66 million bingo duty was paid by non-profit making members' clubs in the year ended 31 March 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the year ended 31 March 1990, approximately £3 million was paid by these clubs.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the principal achievements of his Department since June 1987.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department has ensured that Britain's growing transport needs are met with regard to safety, efficiency and with proper respect for the environment.

Investment in transport infrastructure by both the public and private sectors has been greatly increased. British Rail's investment this year is over 50 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1986-87 and London Transport's is 85 per cent. higher; investment in national roads in England is 70 per cent. higher. Massive investment is already in progress to provide rail and road links to the channel tunnel from the day it opens. The Government's spending plans provide for further substantial increases in investment over the next few years, particularly in London Transport, British Rail and air traffic control.

The private sector also now has a greatly enhanced role in the provision of transport infrastructure, most notably in the channel tunnel, authorised by the 1987 Act, in roads

and bridges such as the Dartford-Thurrock bridge, the second Severn bridge and the Birmingham northern relief road, and in airports such as BAA's new terminal at Stansted. The BAA was privatised in 1987 and the privatisation of the National Bus Company was completed in 1988.

The United Kingdom Government have been in the forefront of moves to achieve greater liberalisation in the provision of transport services in the European Community, where there has been considerable progress on aviation, road haulage and shipping, in international aviation, and in Britain's docks through the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

Transport safety is being enhanced through investment, regulation and publicity. We have approved British Rail's plans to spend £330 million for specific safety measures over the next three years—all that it asked for—and London Underground plans to invest approaching £400 million in further safety improvements over that period. Following a major review of road safety in 1987, the Government set a target of a one third reduction in road accident casualties by the year 2000. This is being implemented vigorously through legislation, including this Session's Road Traffic Bill, through low-cost road engineering schemes and through enhanced publicity campaigns under the safety on the move umbrella, notably on drinking and driving and child road safety. Numerous measures have been taken to improve ferry safety; and both aviation and maritime security are being tightened up, assisted by the new powers in the 1990 Act.

Stringent new European limits for vehicle emissions have been agreed, and unleaded petrol is rapidly supplanting leaded. Careful environmental assessments are undertaken for all national road schemes, and new roads are now being blended into the environment through more imaginative landscaping. More stringent limits on noise levels have been introduced for both road vehicles and aircraft.

Trust Ports

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of the comments of the British Ports Federation submitted at the request of the then shipping minister on 9 November 1990 on the matter of trust ports privatisation and consultation.

Mr. McLoughlin: The meeting to which the hon. Lady refers was one of a regular series of discussions at ministerial level between the Department of Transport and the federation, which are not limited to trust ports privatisation and consultation. My noble Friend Lord Brabazon of Tara did not at that meeting request, nor did he subsequently receive, a statement on these topics from the federation.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, following receipt of Civil Aviation Authority report CAP578 on 22 January, he has commissioned any research into the number of spare slots at Heathrow airport.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Civil Aviation Authority noted in the consultation document it issued in November the number of unused slots at Heathrow in a busy week during summer 1990. More generally, the authority addressed the question of spare capacity at Heathrow in its advice last year on the United Kingdom's longer-term airport needs.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has asked the Civil Aviation Authority to undertake research into the implications of the recommendations of Civil Aviation Authority report CAP578 on the number of spare slots that would be applied for at Heathrow airport.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. The Civil Aviation Authority has advised in CAP578 that the effects of abolishing Heathrow rules one, two and three are unpredictable, in part because they must depend on decisions which might be taken by foreign airlines on whether to seek to mount services at Heathrow.

London Transport

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement on the financial position of London Transport.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government have had discussions with London Transport about the financial difficulties it has encountered in 1990-91. The Government have concluded that the appropriate course is to increase London Transport's external financing limit for 1990-91 by £55 million. At the same time, an increase of £7·55 million is necessary to cover London Transport's expenditure in the current year on east-west crossrail, and costs associated with safeguarding the Chelsea-Hackney line proposal. These increases will change London Transport's 1990-91 EFL from £448·00 million to £510·55 million. This is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Urgent discussions with London Transport are continuing, about their budget for 1991-92. Pending the outcome of those discussions, London Transport's EFL and capital expenditure ceilings will remain at the levels previously announced.

Dial-a-Ride Service

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements have been made to fund the London dial-a-ride service.

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased to announce that the grant to London dial-a-ride services for 1991-92 will be £10·015 million, an increase of over £1·7 million on 1990-91. It has been most encouraging to see the rapid expansion of the scheme in recent years and I am confident that this latest injection of cash will allow London Transport to increase the services still further in 1991-92 by an estimated 60,000 journeys—equivalent to an increase of 9 per cent.—and also to proceed with the first stages of their planned reorganisation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Plant Classification

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for projects to help the consistent classification of plants, as proposed by Dr. Martin Holdgate FRS at the nature conservancy conference on 31 January.

Mrs. Chalker: We are studing Dr. Holdgate's proposal within the context of our overall assistance to developing countries on environmental issues, including biodiversity, and requests from them.

Famine Relief

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria are used to determine whether Hercules aircraft are used for famine relief.

Mrs. Chalker: Aircraft of any type are used as a last resort in famine relief operations, due to their limited load capacity and extremely high operating costs. Where sea or ground transport cannot be used, however, airlifts are recognised as an alternative means of delivering food. In such operations Hercules aircraft have advantages in operating into short or inaccessible airstrips.

Somalia

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on diplomatic relations with Somalia.

Mrs. Chalker: The British embassy in Mogadishu was closed and staff withdrawn in early January because of the complete breakdown in law and order. Since the United Kingdom maintains diplomatic relations with states rather than governments, there has been no breach in relations. We keep in regular contact with the Somali ambassador in London as well as with representatives of the various Somali groups.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Services Agency

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimate he has of the total value of Crown business so far lost by the Property Services Agency through competitive tendering by Government Departments;

(2) how many Crown tenders the Property Services Agency has competed for and how many has it won in competition since Crown customers were untied.

Mr. Yeo: The PSA has submitted competitive bids for some 200 separate commissions since Departments were untied. The extent to which these were successful is commercially sensitive information for the PSA businesses, which it would be inappropriate to disclose, but PSA has been successful in a sizeable proportion. The market testing has provided a powerful stimulus to efficiency, and Departments will have benefited from keener prices.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date he now expects the Property Services Agency to operate on commercial accounts.

Mr. Yeo: PSA Services—PSAS—already produces, for management use, monthly income and expenditure accounts. The implementation of new commercial financial systems is well advanced and as they are introduced they are running in parallel with cash accounting for the Vote. PSAS will continue to operate on the basis of cash accounting until it ceases to be a Government Department.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the salary cost, including pay bonuses and compensation paid on termination of contract, of the Property Services Agency board members in the period January 1990 to January 1991.

Mr. Yeo: The salary cost of the executive members of the PSAS board for the 1990 calendar year was £680,100. The non-executive members received fees amounting to £23,904 in the same year.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many performance pay bonuses have been awarded to Property Services Agency board members in the period 1 January 1990 to 1 January 1991; and what was the total cost of those bonuses.

Mr. Yeo: During the 1990 calendar year three performance pay bonuses totalling £11,468 were awarded to Property Services Agency board members. The salaries of a further three board members included an element of performance pay totalling £8,538 as a result of awards made in previous years.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he expects compulsory redundancies among employees of the Property Services Agency Government-owned companies.

Mr. Yeo: The Property Services Agency hopes to achieve most of its required manpower reduction by voluntary means, but some compulsory redundancies will be inevitable.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those local authorities whose non-domestic rate poundage rose by less than 10·9 per cent. in 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo: I am arranging for copies of the information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Rates, Kent

Mr. Cambell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average rates bill in 1989-90 for each local authority in Kent.

Mr. Key: The information requested is as follows:

	£
Ashford	452
Canterbury	420
Dartford	402

	£
Dover	372
Gillingham	391
Gravesham	441
Maidstone	433
Rochester on Medway	376
Sevenoaks	474
Shepway	475
Swale	340
Thanet	425
Tonbridge and Malling	438
Tunbridge Wells	435

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the provision of assistance by his Department at the end of military conflict in the Gulf in safely packaging the radioactively contaminated rubble and radioactive waste arising from the Iraqi nuclear facilities destroyed by allied bombing.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's Government will give consideration to provision of such assistance, if so requested, following the end of current hostilities.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the credit approvals of each local authority in England for 1990-91 and 1991-92, showing the percentage change between the two years.

Mr. Portillo: A list of the basic credit approvals issued to local authorities in England for 1991-92 was placed in the House of Commons Library on 4 January 1991. I am arranging for a further list to be placed in the Library giving, for each authority, basic credit approvals for 1990-91 and 1991-92 and showing the percentage changes between the two years.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the annual capital guideline of each local authority in England for 1990-91 and 1991-92, showing the percentage change between the two years.

Mr. Portillo: Annual capital guidelines—ACGs—for local authorities in England are issued by the Secretary of State responsible for each service block. My Department is responsible for issuing ACGs in respect of the housing and other services blocks—OSB. I am arranging for two lists to be placed in the Library giving, for each authority, the 1990-91 and 1991-92 ACGs for housing and OSB respectively and showing the percentage change between the two years.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received from the Audit Commission concerning the pursuit of non-payers of poll tax through the courts; and whether he has any plans to offer additional moneys to magistrates courts to cover such cases.

Mr. Key: The Audit Commission produced a report in November 1990 on the administration of the community charge. Among other things, it suggested to authorities that they should liaise closely with clerks to magistrates courts in order to ensure that community charge cases are handled satisfactorily and in appropriate numbers. We have warmly welcomed this report and strongly commended its findings to local authorities. In January the Audit Commission's paper for the local government review suggested that authorities are now able to issue more summonses but court time remains inadequate in most authorities. On the question of magistrates courts funding I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State, Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *492*.

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the £1·7 billion funding available for the community charge reduction scheme is to be allocated to *(a)* Blackburn, *(b)* Hyndburn and *(c)* Burnley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: This information is not yet available. The amount of reduction scheme grant a charging authority receives will depend on the personal community charge that it sets for 1991-92 and the number of eligible people in its area. Claims for community charge reduction scheme grant will be requested shortly.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's latest estimate of local authority spending on collecting the poll tax.

Mr. Key: The English local authorities budgeted to spend £440·2 million on collecting the community charge in 1990-91.

Community Charge, Kent

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the average level of community charge for each local authority in the Kent area for two adult person households;

(2) what was the average level of community charge for each local authority in the Kent area for three adult person households.

Mr. Key: In 1990-91 each adult, unless a student or exempted, would be liable for a full personal community charge less, depending on personal circumstances, amounts for transitional relief and community charge rebate. The following table, using information returned by the local authorities, shows the estimated average community charge and the average charge after reliefs and rebates.

	Average charge £	*Average charge after transitional relief and community charge benefit* £
Ashford	299	267
Canterbury	300	256
Dartford	330	292
Dover	298	271
Gillingham	285	260
Gravesham	294	262
Maidstone	330	308
Rochester upon Medway	249	224

	Average charge £	Average charge after transitional relief and community charge benefit £
Sevenoaks	322	299
Shepway	347	293
Swale	299	260
Thanet	300	257
Tonbridge and Malling	320	298
Tunbridge Wells	315	294

Private Rented Accommodation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress in reviving the private rented sector since the passage of the Housing Act 1988.

Mr. Yeo: It is too early to assess the overall impact of the Act on private renting. Research now in progress will provide information in the course of 1991. There are, however, clear signs of increased activity in the residential lettings market. In particular, it is estimated that business expansion scheme companies have so far raised £580 million, which will provide over 10,000 new homes to rent.

Leisure Centres

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table listing the total capital expenditure on leisure centres and swimming baths by local authorities in the last five years for which detailed information is available.

Mr. Portillo: Following is the information:

Year	Leisure centres	Swimming pools
1984-85	107·914	35·429
1985-86	63·998	25·534
1986-87	76·687	34·672
1987-88	87·783	51·056
1988-89	105·223	51·311

Figures are shown in £ million.

NB: For the years 1987-88 and 1988-89 the figures for leisure centres include expenditure on indoor sports and community centres; for the years 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87 data were collected under the heading sports and recreation centres.

Home Repair Grants

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest figures, by quarter, for the number of *(a)* applications and *(b)* approvals of the various grants for home renovation and repair (i) since June 1990 and (ii) for the eight quarters ending in June 1990.

Mr. Yeo: The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 changed the system of renovation grants to private owners and tenants in England from 1 July 1990. Under the new system the Department collects information about grant applications approved and final payments made. Information about grant approvals under the new system during the third quarter of 1990 are shown in the table. Figures for the fourth quarter of 1990 are not yet available. The previous system of grants to private owners and tenants ended at 30 June 1990. Grant applications and approvals under the old system up to and including the first quarter of 1990 are shown in table 2.16 of "Housing and Construction Statistics Part 2" June 1990. A copy of this publication is in the Library.

Renovation grants under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Grant applications approved—England—third quarter, 1990

	Mandatory	Discretionary
Renovation grants	144	66
HMO[1] grants	Nil	Nil
Common parts grants	Nil	Nil
Disabled facilities grant	172	16
Minor works assistance	—	3,362

[1] Houses in multiple occupation.

Rubbish Collection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's latest estimate of local authority spending on rubbish collection.

Mr. Key: The English local authorities budgeted to spend £476·9 million on refuse collection in 1990-91.

Customer Services Committees

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current payment to those chairing customer services committees; and what proposals he has to increase these payments.

Mr. Trippier: The remuneration of the chairmen of the customer service committees is a matter for the Director General of Water Services to determine with the approval of the Treasury.

Plant Protection

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for representation at the fourth international parks conference at Caracas in 1992, in relation to protection of areas of plant communities, as proposed by Dr. Rodwell of Lancaster university.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that the fourth world congress on national parks and protected areas will include discussions on the classification and monitoring of vegetation. The International union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, as organisers of the congress, is considering inviting Dr. Rodwell to participate in these discussions.

Caravan Sites

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will respond to the Countryside Commission's proposal for certain caravan sites to be removed from heritage coastlines.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is aware that the Countryside Commission published a policy statement on heritage coasts last month and that the commission intends to seek his views on it in due course.

Residential Homes

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to enable local authorities to establish companies or trusts to run residential homes for the elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Local authorities already have powers to promote the formation of societies, trusts or companies for these and other purposes under the Housing Associations Act 1985.

Sleeping Rough

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which voluntary organisations carried out the survey of people sleeping rough in London referred to by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 8 January, *Official Report*, column *543*; and on what date the survey was conducted;

(2) if he will provide a borough-by-borough breakdown of the 1,046 people sleeping rough in London quoted by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 8 February, *Official Report*, column *543;*

(3) whether the Metropolitan police took part in the survey of people sleeping rough in London referred to by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 8 January, *Official Report*, column *543*.

Sir George Young: The estimate of 1,046 people sleeping rough in central London quoted by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary was drawn from estimates made by the voluntary organisations listed in the table. These estimates were made at the end of January in relation to seven areas in central London in which the main concentrations of rough sleepers are found. The voluntary organisations are in regular contact with the Metropolitan police but they did not consult the police on these estimates.

The estimates for the seven areas were as follows; it is not possible to analyse them on a borough-by-borough basis:

	Number
Strand and West End	130
Victoria and Vauxhall	300
Earl's Court and Hammersmith Broadway	56
The "Bullring" and Waterloo	120
The City	130
Lincoln's Inn Fields and Kingsway	210
King's Cross	100

The voluntary organisations that took part in the estimates were:

Salvation Army
Beacon House
Providence Row Housing Association
East London Homeless Primary Care Team
Look Ahead Housing Association
City Social Services
St. Botolph's Day Centre
Thamesreach
Church Housing Association
Roman Catholic Chaplaincy for the Homeless
King's Cross Homelessness Project
Camden Homeless Monitoring Group
New Horizon
Shaftesbury Society
St. Mongo's Association
North Lambeth Day Centre
De Paul Trust
Vauxhall Action for the Homeless in the Community
The Passage Day Centre
St. Vincent Centre
The Cardinal Hume Centre
Streetwise Youth
The Basement Project
The Joint Homelessness Team
—Westminster Social Services
Arlington House
Hornsey YMCA
Threshold Housing Advice Centre
St. Martin's Social Care Unit
The London Connection
Piccadilly Advice Centre
Centrepoint Soho
Bondway Housing Association
Homeless Network

Community Forests

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to establish further community forests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: As part of their joint initiative to develop a programme of community forests near major conurbations, the Countryside Commission and Forestry Commission have announced nine new candidate sites. The locations are Bedford, Bristol, Cleveland, Manchester, Merseyside, Nottingham, south Hertfordshire, South Yorkshire and Swindon. As the next step, the Government have authoritised the commissions to propose to their local authority partners the appointment of project teams for each area. These teams, consulting closely with interested parties, will draw up detailed plans as the basis for deciding future action. Such plans are already in preparation for three other sites: the Forest of Mercia—south Staffordshire; the Great North Forest—south Tyneside and north-east Durham; and Thames Chase—to the east of London. The further areas bring the total programme proposed to 12 forests, spread throughout England.

US Service Men

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will pay the grant to parishes in respect of resident United States service men, announced on 3 May 1990.

Mr. Portillo: Claims by parishes for a one-off grant, payable exceptionally for 1990-91, in respect of resident US service men who are exempt from the community charge have now been assessed. A list showing determinations of grant for each eligible parish has been placed in the Library.

Homelessness

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will make a statement on the recent initiatives taken by his Department to help relieve the plight of the homeless.

Mr. Yeo *[pursuant to the reply, 30 January 1991, c. 535.]:* I am today placing in the Library a list of 78 voluntary organisations to which we are offering grants for 1991-92. In all, over £4·5 million will be available for specific projects providing practical help for homeless people and for the second phase of the national

homelessness advice service coordinated through citizens' advice bureaux with support from Shelter and the London Housing Aid Centre. This represents an increase of over 100 per cent. of the £2 million available in 1990-91. The extra money has made it possible for us to help a much larger number of voluntary organisations, most of them outside London. The grants are a recognition of the vital role which these organisations play in relieving the problems experienced by the homeless and in encouraging them towards independent living.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the total amount of public money allocated to the London Docklands development corporation for each year since 1981, at current prices, indicating for each year what proportion the figure is in relation to total allocation for urban development corporations, and the proportion in relation to the urban block.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* Information on public expenditure totals is as follows:

Urban block public expenditure
£ million—outturn prices

	LDDC external financing limits	*All UDCs external financing limits*	*LDDC as percentage of all UDCs*	[1]*Urban block total*	*LDDC as percentage of block*
1981-82	31	38	82	162	19
1982-83	41	62	66	283	14
1983-84	62	94	66	325	19
1984-85	58	88	66	450	13
1985-86	57	86	66	436	13
1986-87	65	[2]89	73	429	15
1987-88	83	134	62	483	17
1988-89	116	[2]234	50	559	25
1989-90	256	436	59	[3]760	34
1990-91[4]	333	550	61	905	37

[1] Includes for 1984-85 onwards other Government Departments' contributions to the Urban Programme.
[2] LDDC and Merseyside were the only UDCs until February 1987. Four second generation UDCs were set up in 1987 in England and the four third generation UDCs in 1988-89.
[3] Includes City Action teams, transferred from DTI during 1989-90.
[4] Current provision.

Industrial Relocation

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans for environmental grants for new buildings to encourage industrial relocation out of residential urban areas.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* I have no such plans, but urban development corporations have powers to offer a range of grants to businesses relocating in their areas. Environmental improvement is a key element of such redevelopment.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock, *Official Report*, 29 January, columns *472-73*, if he will make it his policy to *(a)* consult the private sector on the best use of the powers of derogation and *(b)* ensure that all legislation and regulations ultimately controlled by his Department encourage both the development and use of refuse-derived fuels as an economically viable commodity and do not add to its cost in the medium term.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* As regards consultation, I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *87*. The Government's policy is to encourage the recycling and productive use of waste, where possible, but I am not in a position to give general assurances of the kind sought about the effect of legislation for which my Department is responsible.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parole

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to announce his decision in relation to the parole board's recommendation in the case of Dennis Stafford.

Mrs. Rumbold: Mr. Stafford has already been notified of this decision.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many scientific procedures were carried out on animals in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland in 1989;

(2) what response he has made to the criticisms contained within the RSPCA/FRAME report on the use of non-human primates as laboratory animals in Britain; and whether he has any plans to implement its main recommendations;

(3) how the likely benefits of a procedure are assessed when considering a project licence application under section 5(4) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; whether any assessment is made concerning how useful the product to be tested will be once marketed; and how project licences issued for the testing of cosmetics have been justified under this section.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have nothing to add to the replies which I gave to similar questions from the hon. Member on 11 December, at columns *348-49*.

Refugees

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to ensure that asylum-seekers are granted comprehensive advice on asylum procedures and information on agencies and refugee community organisations upon their arrival in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government provide 25 per cent. of the funding of the refugee unit of the United Kingdom immigration advisory service for the purpose of advising asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. I am satisfied that the present arrangements for informing asylum seekers of the advice available from the United Kingdom immigration advisory service are adequate.

Public Order Act

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has completed his evaluation of section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) on 6 February 1991, at column *141*.

Bail Hostels

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations were undertaken by the probation service with the residents of Elworth prior to the recent submission of an application to open a bail hostel within the village.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that Cheshire probation service began consultation with local residents after the planning application was submitted to Congleton borough council but before the formal planning committee meeting on 4 December 1990 when planning permission was refused.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences were committed by individuals resident in bail hostels at the time of the offence in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The information is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria upon which potential sites for bail hostels are assessed by the probation service.

Mr. John Patten: Local probation services assess potential sites for bail hostels on the basis of a range of factors such as the level of unmet demand for bail places in the surrounding area; the availability of suitable properties in terms of size, price and ease of management; the proximity of amenities and public transport links; the general character of the area and the likelihood of planning consent being granted.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will visit the village of Elworth to meet local residents to discuss the proposal to site a bail hostel in the village.

Mr. John Patten: The role of the Home Office in these matters is confined to approval of proposals that new hostels should be set up and their funding. It falls to local probation committees to choose the particular sites, negotiate purchases, consult the neighbours and apply for the relevant planning consents. I understand that Cheshire probation service is already discussing its proposal to site a bail hostel in Elworth with local residents and representatives. I hope that discussions can continue on this basis.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration is given by the probation service to the proximity of primary schools when assessing potential sites for use as bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: The proximity of a primary school or schools may be one of many factors which local probation services need to consider when assessing a potential site for use as a bail hostel.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration is given by the probation service to the proximity of clubs and societies for senior citizens when assessing potential sites for use as bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: The proximity of such clubs or societies may be one of many factors which local probation services may need to consider when assessing a site for use as a bail hostel.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration is given by the probation service to local employment opportunities for inmates when assessing potential sites for use as bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: Unemployed bailees can experience difficulty in finding local jobs because the average period of residence on bail is only a few weeks. In general terms, the local probation service would, therefore, look first of all for good public transport links so that hostel residents already in work could, wherever possible, retain their existing employment.

Prisons (Farm Land)

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing, in respect of each prison establishment listed in appendix 3 to the report of the work of the prison service April 1989 to March 1990, the acreage of farm land attached to it.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is as follows:

Establishment	*Acres*
Blantyre House	2
Blundeston	15
Buckley Hall	76
Bullwood Hall	14
Camp Hill	198
Channings Wood	14
Dartmoor	1,368
East Sutton Park	51
Erlestoke House	12
Everthorpe	274
Featherstone	393
Gartree	86
Guys Marsh	30
Hatfield	606

Establishment	Acres
Hewell Grange	105
Hindley	38
Hollesley Bay Colony	1,200
Kirkham	400
Leyhill	24
Lindholme	357
Littlehey	69
Lowdham Grange	357
New Hall	129
Northallerton	4
North Sea Camp	868
Onley	280
Portland	165
Rudgate	19
Spring Hill	10
Standford Hill	196
Stocken Hall	412
Swinfen Hall	81
Usk	237
The Verne	168
Werrington	32
Whatton	17
Wymott	69

Establishments not listed have no farmland attached.

Annual Report Costs

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Home Office annual report 1991 cost to produce and distribute.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The costs of printing, publishing and distribution were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office which aims to recover its costs from sales revenue.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Higher Education

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many educational institutions had *(a)* not set criteria for payment of access funds and *(b)* not paid out access funds by 31 December 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: These are matters for the institutions concerned. The information is not held centrally.

Nursery Education

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice his Department gives to those local education authorities who are considering charging for nursery education.

Mr. Eggar: Under Section 106 of the Education Reform Act 1988, charges cannot be made for admission to maintained schools or for education provided for registered pupils at maintained schools during school hours.

Inner-city Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the reasons for the delay in publishing a clear and comprehensive statement of the Government's overall objectives for sport and recreation in inner-city areas; and when such a statement will be published.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 5 February 1991, *Official Report*, column *131*.

Students

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which colleges of higher education have expressed opposition to the implementation of top-up fees for students in their institutions.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The setting of fees is properly for individual higher education institutions. Information is not collected about their views on appropriate fee levels.

Child Abuse

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), first met Ms. Esther Rantzen to discuss child abuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, when he first met Ms. Esther Rantzen to discuss child abuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My officials and I met Ms. Rantzen on 26 November, not in October, as alleged in an article in *The People*, dated 10 February. She told us of some material which she thought might warrant investigation. It was not until 20 December we had sufficient material from her office to investigate. Any allegation of this kind relating to teachers' misconduct is investigated urgently and thoroughly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Beer

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of beer will apply to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: In its report on the supply of beer in the United Kingdom published on 21 March 1989 the Monopolies and Mergers Commission looked at the market in Northern Ireland. The commission noted that the markets in Scotland and Northern Ireland differed in some respects from those in England and Wales, but that in others were similar. The commission concluded that the characteristics of those markets were not so different as to warrant separate regulation. The Supply of Beer Orders made following the report therefore apply equally to Northern Ireland and Scotland as to other parts of the United Kingdom.

Rugby

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer to the Director General of Fair Trading the question of interference by the English Rugby Football Union with the commercial activities of individual English international players.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to do so. It does not seem to me that these matters are capable of being dealt with under the competition legislation for which the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible.

Film Industry

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the basis used to calculate the current funding for British film screen finance.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* The current Government grant for British Screen Finance Limited—BSF—was set after discussions with the company about the level of funding required to administer its support schemes for feature film production, short films and script development. The £2 million annual grant announced in July 1989 by the then Secretary of State for three years from 1991 also took account for the loans received from BSF's private sector shareholders.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the name and date of appointment of each Minister within his Department who has had responsibility for the British film industry since 1979.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* The names of the Ministers who have had responsibility for film policy since 1979 and the dates on which they were first appointed to the Department are as follows:

Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes (4 May 1979), right hon. Norman Tebbit (7 May 1979), right hon. Kenneth Baker (5 January 1981), Lord Trefgarne (5 August 1981), Iain Sproat (30 September 1981), right hon. Norman Lamont (30 September 1981), John Butcher (6 April 1982), right hon. Sir Geoffrey Pattie (10 September 1984), Robert Atkins (15 August 1987), Eric Forth (25 July 1988) and Lord Hesketh (23 July 1990).

Responsibility for film policy does not necessarily coincide with the date of appointment to the Department.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy that advice and counselling for civil servants employed by ECGD on their future career options should be provided from sources outside that department.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* ECGD staff are able to seek advice and counselling on career matters within the Department in the usual way. They are also free to seek advice from other sources if they wish.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements he has made to provide advice and counselling for civil servants employed within the ECGD, and in particular those in the insurance services group, on their future career options in the light of Government's policy to privatise the ECGD.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* The ECGD has provided all its staff with a summary of their existing terms and conditions of employment, including pensions, to help them compare the terms and conditions which will be offered by the prospective owners of the privatised company. The ECGD has also arranged a series of career decision workshops to help staff in their approach to the issues involved in decisions about their future careers. When the private sector terms and conditions on offer are known, the Government Actuary's department will express a view about their compliance with the requirements of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and this will be transmitted to staff. All ECGD staff are, of course, able to take advantage of the Department's normal facilities for career guidance and counselling.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

NATO Science Programme

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money the Foreign Office has contributed towards the NATO science programme in each of the last 10 years; and if he has any plans to stop this contribution.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The NATO science programme is a co-operative international programme for advancing the frontiers of civil science through high-level basic research. It benefits all members of the alliance. It has recently increased its links with scientists in central and eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Figures for the overall programme and the United Kingdom contribution in the last 10 years are as follows:

	Total NATO science programme budget in Belgian francs	*United Kingdom share in per cent. (paid by FCO)*	*United Kingdom share in Belgian francs*
1980	423,500,000	19·50	82,582,500
1981	507,000,000	19·50	98,865,000
1982	575,000,000	19·50	112,125,000
1983	712,000,000	19·50	138,840,000
1984	778,000,000	18·82	146,419,000
1985	818,000,000	18·82	153,947,600
1986	854,000,000	18·82	160,722,800
1987	871,000,000	18·82	163,922,200
1988	905,000,000	18·82	170,321,000
1989	932,500,000	18·82	175,496,500
1990	970,000,000	18·82	182,554,000

We have no plans to stop the United Kingdom contribution to the NATO science programme.

HEALTH

Embryology Authority

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the embryology authority to assume its full powers and commence its work.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority started work when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act received Royal Assent in November last year. The authority is currently planning the arrangements which need to be in place by the time it assumes its full powers and commences licensing.

I announced today in my speech to the Interim Licensing Authority's annual meeting for infertility treatment centres and ethics committees, that an order will be laid shortly which will enable the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to assume its full powers on 1 August this year.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled in national health service hospitals during the current financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: In the year ending 31 March 1990 provisional figures show that an estimated 315,000 operations did not take place at the originally appointed time. During that year the national health service completed 8·6 million in-patient and day-patient treatments—an increase of 3 per cent. over the previous year and 30 per cent. over 1979.

Blood Products

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information the Medicines Control Agency has on the import of unlicensed high purity factor VIII products for the treatment of haemophilia A patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under the provisions of the Medicines Act 1968 a medicinal product cannot normally be imported for use with patients except under the authority of a product licence, a clinical trial certificate or under the clinical trial exemption scheme. The Medicines Control Agency holds licensing records in respect of all such products. There are, however, certain circumstances under which medicinal products may be imported without the above authority.

Medical and dental practitioners may import unlicensed medicinal products in order to perform their own clinical trials. In these cases the practitioner must notify the licensing authority by means of the doctors and dentists exemption scheme. The Medicines Control Agency maintains records of all such notifications.

A United Kingdom company may import an unlicensed product which is required by a doctor for a particular patient, under SI No. 673, the Medicines (Exemption from Licences) Importation Order 1984. The company is required to notify the licensing authority prior to each importation.

All information concerning licence and other applications, including notifications, is held in confidence by the Medicines Control Agency in accordance with section 118 of the Act.

Medical and dental practitioners may also import unlicenced products for administration to particular patients—"named patient" supply. Under the terms of this exemption the practitioner is not required to notify the Licensing authority. As a consequence the Medicines Control Agency does not maintain centralised records of this type of supply.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to visit the bio products laboratory; what plans he has for its privatisation; what is the cost of the laboratory to the national health service; and what charges it makes to health authorities for human blood and blood-derived products.

Mr. Dorrell: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health will visit the bio products laboratory on 11 March. The planned visit is a routine one. There are no plans to privatise the laboratory.

The aggregate cost of the bio products laboratory to the NHS is not separately identified. The bio products laboratory supplies products derived from human blood and the charges are shown in the table. These charges do not include any element for the freely donated blood from which the products are derived. The prices paid by the health authorities are not necessarily those shown in the table as there are volume related discounts for some product lines.

Therapeutic product prices
Price list

Product code	*Description*	*Cash list price*
1. *Coagulation Factors*		
9124	Factor VII	25p/u
9109	Factor VIII (8Y)	28p/iu
9144	Factor IX (with Heparin)	25p/iu
9125	Factor XI	25p/u
9126	Factor XIII	25p/u
9127	Antithrombin III 1000iu	£100·00
2. *Albumin*		
9101	Albumin 4·5 per cent. 100ml	£10·00
9102	Albumin 4·5 per cent. 250ml	£21·00
9103	Albumin 4·5 per cent. 500ml	£33·00
9104	Albumin 10 per cent. 2·5ml	£6·00
9105	Albumin 10 per cent. 100ml	£21·00
9106	Albumin 20 per cent. 5ml	£2·75
9107	Albumin 20 per cent. 100ml	£32·00
3. *Immunoglobulins*		
9112	Human Normal Immunoglobulin 250mg	£3·10
9113	Human Normal Immunoglobulin 750mg	£6·40
9115	Human Anti-D (RHo) Immunoglobulin 250iu	£10·90
9116	Human Anti-D (RHo) Immunoglobulin 500iu	£19·25
9117	Human Anti-D (RHo) Immunoglobulin 2,500iu	£72·50
9118	Human Tetanus Immunoglobulin	£12·50
9119	Human Varicella-Zoster Immunoglobulin	£121·00
9146	Human Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin 200iu	£41·00
9121	Human Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin 500iu	£82·60
9122	Human Rabies Immunoglobulin	£113·00

Mental Illness

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the capital and revenue savings obtained from the running down and disposal of large-scale mental health hospitals are transferred from health authorities to social service authorities for the expansion of community care services and facilities for the resettlement of discharged patients.

Mr. Dorrell: The resources released by the closure and disposal of psychiatric hospitals are mainly redeployed for the development of community based mental health services. A mechanism exists for the transfer of such resources to local authorities in order to develop social care services through the dowry system described in circular HC(83)6/LAC(83)5, a copy of which is in the Library. Dowries are predominantly used for the resettlement of patients from mental handicap hospitals.

Fluoride

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice his Department has received concerning dangers to health arising from the use of fluoridated toothpaste in areas where the level of fluoride in the water has been raised to 1 part per million;

(2) what advice his Department has received concerning the risk of discolouration of teeth where fluoridated toothpaste is used in areas where the level of fluoride in the water has been raised to 1 part per million;

(3) whether his Department monitors the effect of fluoridated toothpaste and other freely available fluoride additives in areas where the level of fluoride in the water has been raised to 1 part per million;

(4) what guidance he has given to dentists, hospitals, the retail trade and other affected groups about the sale

and use of fluoridated toothpaste in areas where the level of fluoride in the water has been raised to 1 part per million.

Mr. Dorrell: The total daily oral intake of fluoride from food, water and fluoridated toothpaste in those areas in the United Kingdom where the drinking water contains fluoride at 1 part per million, whether present naturally or added, is too low to have any adverse effect on health.

A study to compare the effect on enamel formation of the use of fluoride toothpaste in fluoridated Birmingham and non-fluoridated Leeds concluded that while there was a higher level of mild fluorosis in the fluoridated area there was no evidence of an increase in the higher grades of fluorosis, and that the use of fluoride toothpaste by young children in fluoridated areas was unlikely to produce aesthetically unacceptable levels of enamel fluorosis.

Not all toothpastes are licensed medicinal products. The EC cosmetics directive permits the addition of fluoride ion up to 1,500 ppm. No toothpaste on the United Kingdom market contains more than this and most are limited to 1,000 ppm. A voluntary agreement has been reached with the Cosmetics, Toiletries, and Perfumeries Association to include information on packaging about the amount of toothpaste to be used when cleaning teeth. A toothpaste containing more than 1,500 ppm would only be available on prescription.

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence his Department has of a level of ingestion at which sodium fluoride becomes carcinogenic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has no evidence that shows sodium fluoride to be carcinogenic at any level of ingestion.

The Committee on the Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COC—reviewed the animal data on the carcinogenicity of sodium fluoride in 1990. The only noteworthy finding was a statistically significant dose-related positive trend for the incidence of osteosarcomas in one strain of male rats which was observed in one carcinogenicity study. No osteosarcomas were found in female rats in the same study, or in mice in a parallel study. A further study in another strain of rats showed no evidence of neoplastic effects.

The COC noted that all well conducted in vivo mutagenicity tests were negative; that limited epidemiological data revealed no relationship between bone cancer rates in humans and fluoride concentrations in drinking water; and that there was no available evidence that fluoride causes bone cancers in humans, even in people in whom excessive long-term exposure to fluoride has caused skeletal fluorosis. It concluded that there was no evidence for carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure to fluoride.

Local Government Responsibilities

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he is reconsidering plans for the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act in relation to the roles and responsibilities of local government after April 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 12 February at column *731*.

Staff Accommodation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what status residential accommodation in hospitals used by NHS staff will have once Crown immunity is lifted from NHS property on 1 April.

Mr. Dorrell: From 1 April all lettings of National Health Service staff residential accommodation will be subject to the relevant housing legislation. Staff who already occupy NHS residential accommodation will be offered new tenancy or licence agreements as appropriate.

Residential Homes

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide grant aid to local authorities to enable them to improve residential homes for the elderly to meet the statutory requirements laid down by Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for local authorities, having determined their priorities, to make provision from their annual capital guidelines—ACGs—other receipts and transfers from revenue funds for any improvements which they consider necessary to their residential homes for the elderly. For 1991-92, ACGs of £98 million have been issued to local authorities for the personal social services, an increase of £13 million on 1990-91.

Electoral Statistics

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the total number of electors registered in each parliamentary constituency in England and Wales for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will list the percentage changes that have taken place in each case compared with the previous year's figures.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* total United Kingdom expenditure on health and *(b)* Government expenditure on health, expressing both as a percentage of GNP, in each of the last 20 years.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* The table shows total United Kingdom expenditure on health and total public spending on health since 1970. It expresses each as a proportion of gross domestic product, rather than gross national product. GDP has been used in this presentation for the sake of consistency with other sources of information on public spending such as the autumn statement and the Budget report.

Total United Kingdom and total Government spending on health as a proportion of GDP 1970-1989

	Total United Kingdom expenditure on health	*Percentage of GDP*	*Total Government spending on health*	*Percentage of GDP*
1970	2,195	4·24	1,896	3·66
1971	2,500	4·33	2,158	3·74
1972	2,868	4·44	2,493	3·86

	Total United Kingdom expenditure on health	Percentage of GDP	Total Government spending on health	Percentage of GDP
1973	3,233	4·36	2,806	3,78
1974	4,356	5·20	3,874	4·63
1975	5,838	5·52	5,268	4·98
1976	6,902	5·52	6,233	4·99
1977	7,775	5·34	6,996	4·80
1978	8,934	5·31	8,044	4·78
1979	10,373	5·24	9,288	4·69
1980	13,343	5·77	11,952	5·17
1981	15,405	6·09	13,744	5·43
1982	16,461	5·95	14,474	5·23
1983	18,636	6·17	16,367	5·42
1984	19,768	6·08	17,293	5·32
1985	21,270	5·97	18,496	5·19
1986	23,059	6·02	19,862	5·19
1987	25,302	6·02	21,790	5·18
1988	28,010	5·98	24,024	5·13
1989	30,731	6·03	26,461	5·19

Source: CSO.

NHS Costs

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per consultant appointment in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 11 February 1991]:* Financial returns submitted by district health authorities in England show the average cost per out-patient attendance as £24·86 for 1988-89, and £26·98—provisional figure—for 1989-90. These figures are average for all specialties, and cover direct consultation-treatment costs only.

Health Services, Kent

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each parliamentary constituency in Kent, what percentage of the population are *(a)* owner-occupiers and *(b)* local authority tenants according to the most recent information updated since the 1981 census.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

There is no more recent information for parliamentary constituencies than the 1981 census. Estimates of the number of dwellings owned by four sectors—local authority, other public sector, housing association and private—are provided by local authorities for their areas in the annual housing investment programme returns. These are in the Library. They do not however provide a breakdown of the privately owned dwellings between owner-occupied and rented.

ENERGY

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his expectation of the rise in carbon dioxide emission levels by the year 2005 and the reasons for it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Projections prepared by the Government in 1989 and published in 1990 in energy paper 58, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, suggested that Britain's emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from all sources might be in the range of 178 million to 225 million tonnes of carbon —mtc—by 2005 if no action to control them were taken. These compared with emissions in 1989 of about 160 mtc. This range reflects the assumptions used in energy paper 58 for economic growth, energy prices, and so on.

The White Paper "This Common Inheritance" noted certain developments which had taken place since the publication of energy paper 58 which might affect emissions levels. These were a change in the projected level of new nuclear capacity, which would tend to increase emissions, and an expected increase in the use of gas for electricity generation purposes, which would tend to reduce them.

The Government have announced that Britain is prepared, if other countries take similar action, to set itself the demanding target of returning emissions of carbon dioxide to 1990 levels by 2005.

Coal

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the tonnage of coal produced by *(a)* deep and *(b)* opencast mining for the most recent available year; and what is the projection for these figures in five years' time.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1989-90 the amount of coal produced in Britain was 76·6 million tonnes from deep mines and 18·6 million tonnes from opencast. Future levels of production are for the coal industry to decide and will depend on the tonnages which can be sold on a competitive basis.

Trawsfynnydd Power Station

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will provide details of the ground contamination discovered near the active waste vaults at Trawsfynnydd nuclear power station around September 1990 and the source of this radioactive contamination.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: On 24 July 1990 during excavations for the construction of a new reactor fence close to the former site of a storage tank at the Trawsfynnydd nuclear power station, small amounts of low level radioactive contamination were revealed. This contamination was centred on a bolt approximately twelve inches long and associated rubble. These items are now being stored safely at the station pending their transfer to British Nuclear Fuels plc's low-level waste disposal site at Drigg. There was no radiological hazard to the work force or to members of the public as a result of this incident.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the principal achievements of his Department since November 1990.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department successfully completed the flotation of the 12 regional electricity companies in November, and plans are on schedule for the flotation of the two generating companies this month. Planning is well advanced for the transfer of responsibility for offshore safety matters to the Health and Safety Executive.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the total cost of the advertising campaign for the privatisation of the electricity generating companies.

Mr. Wakeham: It is not the practice to give advertising costs in advance of flotations. All expenditure, including that on marketing, will be reported to Parliament in the usual way.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether at the time he appointed Smith New Court to advise on electricity privatisation he was aware they had been criticised by DTI inspectors for their conduct in the Consolidated Goldfields case.

Mr. Wakeham: I took all relevant factors into account in appointing Smith New Court.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether Smith New Court's appointment as advisers on electricity privatisation was the result of a process of competitive tendering.

Mr. Wakeham: It was agreed in 1989 that there should be the same broking syndicate of James Capel, Rowe and Pitman, Smith New Court, Cazenoves, County NatWest and Kleinwort Benson Securities for both the 12 regional electricity companies and the generating companies flotations. Each of the brokers will receive a broking fee for both issues relating to the amount of stock for which they are responsible. As Smith New Court was already a member of the broking syndicate and as no advisory fee will be payable to Smith New Court, a competitive tender would not be appropriate.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all the individuals and organisations who have been retained by his Department as advisers on electricity privatisation, indicating in each case the aspect on which they have advised together with the date of their appointment and where appropriate the date they ceased to be retained as advisers.

Mr. Wakeham: The information is as follows

Adviser	*Area*	*From*	*To*
Kleinwort Benson	Financial	July 1987	Continuing
Touche Ross	Regulatory/accounting	August 1987	Continuing
Slaughter and May	Legal	August 1987	Continuing
Professor Littlechild	Regulatory	November 1987	May 1989
James Capel	Lead brokers	May 1988	Continuing
Lowe Bell	Public relations	July 1988	January 1990
Merz and McLellan	Technical	August 1987	Continuing
Lloyds Bank	Receiving bank/registrar	August 1988	May 1990[1]
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells[2]	Reporting accountants	May 1988	Continuing
Price Waterhouse	Reporting accountants	May 1988	Continuing
Peat Marwick Mclintock	Reporting accountants	May 1988	Continuing

Adviser	Area	From	To
Binder Hamlyn	Reporting accountants	May 1988	December 1990
Ernst and Whinney[3]	Reporting accountants	May 1988	December 1990
Coopers and Lybrand[2]	Reporting accountants	May 1988	December 1990
Spicer and Oppenheim[4]	Reporting accountants	May 1988	December 1990
Touche Ross	Reporting accountants	May 1988	December 1990
BMRB	Market research	August 1988	Continuing
Davis Polk and Wardell	United States legal	September 1988	Continuing
Russell Reynolds	Executive selection	December 1988	February 1989
Osler Renault	Canadian legal	February 1989	Continuing
Anderson Mori and Rabinowitz	Japanese legal	March 1989	Continuing
Goldman Sachs	United States financial	December 1988	Continuing
Wood Gundy	Canadian financial	March 1989	Continuing
Nomura	Japanese financial	March 1989	Continuing
Credit Suisse First Boston	European Financial	June 1989	Continuing
Saxton Bampfylde	Executive selection	February 1989	October 1989
Price Waterhouse	Accounting	July 1988	July 1989
The VPI Group	Marketing	February 1989	January 1990
Jones Lang Wootton	Property	March 1989	Continuing
UKAEA	Advanced gas-cooled reactor	September 1989	October 1989
Nuclear Services Group	Decommissioning	April 1989	April 1989
Lamb and Edge	Property valuers	June 1989	August 1990
Grimley J. R. Eve	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Gerald Eve	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Knight Frank Rutley	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Weatherall Green and Smith	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Debenham Tewson and Cheshire	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Hartnell Taylor and Cook	Property valuers	June 1989	September 1990
Connell Hallum and Brackett	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Matthews and Goodman	Property valuers	June 1989	March 1990
Cook and Arkwright	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Bernard Thorpe	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Henry Butcher	Property valuers	June 1989	September 1990
Debenham Tewson and Chinnocks	Property valuers	August 1990	Continuing
Edward Erdman	Property valuers	August 1990	Continuing
Lloyd Northover	Design	January 1990	February 1990
Coopers and Lybrand[2]	Salaries	July 1989	April 1990
Williams Lea	Printing	April 1989	October 1989
Dewe Rogerson	Marketing and public relations	February 1990	Continuing
Lowe Bell	Special marketing and public relations	February 1990	February 1990

Adviser	*Area*	*From*	*To*
Russell Reynolds	Executive selection	February 1990	July 1990
RL Associates	Licence X factors	January 1990	Continuing
Lincoln Hannah	Press cutting	March 1990	Continuing
Imagination	Roadshows	May 1990	Continuing
WCRS	Advertising	May 1990	December 1990
Rowe and Pitman	Brokers	September 1990	Continuing
J. Henry Schroder Wagg	Possible PowerGen trade sale	July 1990	September 1990
J. Chiene	Pricing	June 1990	Continuing
J. Henry Schroder Wagg	Underwriting	September 1990	November 1990[3]
Company Writers	Prospectus	September 1990	October 1990
Phillips and Buck	Legal	July 1990	August 1990

Notes:
Certain overseas lawyers have provided advice on overseas jurisdictions.

[1] Lloyds Bank were initially appointed to advise on receiving bank and registrar issues and subsequently appointed as the lead Receiving Bank.
[2] Coopers and Lybrand and Deloitte Haskins and Sells have merged and are now known as Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte.
[3] Now known as Ernst and Young.
[4] Now part of Touche Ross.
[5] Subsequently appointed as Lead Underwriter.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what will be the total underwriting fees in respect of the flotation of the electricity generating companies.

Mr. Wakeham: The total underwriting fees on the flotation of the electricity generating companies have not yet been fixed. The fees will only be settled once the price and terms of the offer for sale are agreed.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he, any other Minister or any of his officials, last had discussions with any director, employee or adviser of the Hanson Group or any of its companies about electricity privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: My private discussions with companies and individuals about electricity privatisation are confidential. I announced on 23 August 1990 that discussions with Hanson plc on a possible trade sale of PowerGen had ended.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the total fees paid out so far to Dewe Rogerson for its involvement in electricity privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: The fees paid to advisers are commercially confidential. The full costs of the privatisation, including marketing costs, will be reported to Parliament in the usual way.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information is collected systematically by his Department to enable him to discharge his duty under section 3(3)(b) of the Electricity Act 1989 to ensure that electricity distribution companies promote the efficient use of electricity supplied to consumers.

Mr. Wakeham: Section 3 of the Electricity Act 1989 sets out various duties I have to take into account when exercising my functions under the Act. In granting the initial licences to the regional electricity companies, I included conditions in their public supply licences requiring them to produce a code of practice for the provision of information on the efficient use of electricity and to comply with a standard set for this activity. It falls to the Director General of Electricity Supply to approve and monitor those codes and to determine the actual standard of performance.

Electricity Disconnections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give the source of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary's figures on electricity disconnections of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *318*, and publish the full figures.

Mr. Wakeham: The figures referred to were provided by the Office of Electricity Regulation. The total number of disconnections for the year ending 30 June, which were the latest figures available in November, stood at 62,262, representing 0·33 per cent. of domestic consumers. In 197[illegible] the total was 125,483, representing 0·80 per cent. of domestic consumers.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information is collected systematically by his Department to enable him to discharge his duty under section 3(3)(a)(ii) of the Electricity Act 1989.

Mr. Wakeham: The Secretary of State's duty to protect the interests of consumers in respect of the continuity of supply was taken into account in placing conditions requiring adherence to matters such as the generation security standard, and the distribution and grid codes in the initial Public Electricity Supply and other licences granted by him under the Electricity Act 1989. Responsibility for monitoring and enforcing those

conditions lies with the Director General of Electricity Supply. The electricity supply regulations require my Department to be informed of each case of major supply interruption.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when the last quarterly figures for electricity disconnections were published.

Mr. Wakeham: The figures for the year ending 30 September were published by the Office of Electricity Regulation on 12 February. The total number of disconnections during the quarter ending 30 September stood at 14,189, or 0·07 per cent. of all domestic consumers. The number of disconnections for the year ending 30 September was 57,846 or 0·30 per cent. of domestic consumers. The figures for the quarter ending 31 December are expected to be published shortly.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will request the Director General of the Office of Electricity Regulation to initiate a study into the level of cut-offs and voluntary cut-offs during the current cold snap.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Director General of Electricity Supply continually monitors both the level of disconnections and the regional electricity companies' practices relating to disconnections.

Orimulsion

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library any information held by his Department on the environmental impact of the burning of orimulsion in power stations.

Mr. Wakeham: I am placing a copy of PowerGen's environmental statement for the installation of an electrostatic precipitator at the Ince B power station and explanatory booklets on orimulsion prepared by BP Bitor in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when his Department first knew that orimulsion was to be imported into Britain to be burnt in power stations.

Mr. Wakeham: Decisions on the type and quantity of fuel used in electricity generation are an operational matter for the industry. The Central Electricity Generating Board started trials involving the use of orimulsion at the Ince B power station in early 1988 when a single burner was modified to allow the burning of 200 tonnes of the fuel.

Power Stations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what tonnage of oil was burnt in power stations in 1986 and each subsequent year.

Mr. Wakeham: Figures for the quantity of oil burnt in power stations by the major generating companies in the United Kingdom are as follows:

	Million tonnes
1986	6·1
1987	4·8
1988	5·4
1989	5·5
1990	6·7

Interviews

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many interviews he has given to individual journalists since 1 August 1990.

Mr. Wakeham: I have given a number of interviews since 1 August 1990, individually and collectively, to journalists with an interest in the energy industries. The precise number of interviews is not readily available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Health Service

12. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the level of spending on the health service in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: A total of £1·16 billion will be spent on the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland in 1991-92. This is an increase of some £127 million or 12·3 per cent. over 1990-91, and demonstrates the Government's commitment to maintaining high standards of services, able to meet the demands of the 1990s.

Hospital Provision

13. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on funding for capital costs in hospital provision.

Mr. Hanley: Funding for capital costs in the current year amounts to over £45 million, an increase of 18 per cent. over last year.

Schemes costing more than £1 million are managed directly by the Department of Health and Social Services, (that's about £16 million) with the balance administered by the boards after option appraisal.

Aircraft Industry

14. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the development of the aircraft construction industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Following its privatisation in October 1989, Short Brothers plc, which is the only aircraft manufacturer in Northern Ireland, is implementing a major capital investment programme aimed at making it a viable and self-sustaining aerospace employer.

Extortion

15. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest position with regard to the stopping of extortion rackets.

Dr. Mawhinney: Action to cut off sources of terrorist finance is a vital part of the Government's strategy for ending terrorism in Northern Ireland. Recent action (led by the RUC) has been successful in curtailing the flow of

money from a number of traditional sources—including extortion. Parliament is currently being asked to strengthen the law against more sophisticated forms of terrorist financing.

Tourism

17. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the development of tourism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The Government is confident that the strategy for tourism now being implemented should achieve sustained growth of tourism to and within Northern Ireland.

23. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider supporting the creation of an all-Ireland tourist authority.

Mr. Needham: I am satisfied that co-operation between the two existing tourist boards represents the best way of promoting the holiday attractions of both parts of the island of Ireland.

Security

18. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: Since I answered a similar question on 17 January there have been two civilian deaths arising from the security situation in Northern Ireland. The police and Army continue to make significant finds of arms and ammunition, and have in recent weeks made several arrests.

26. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next proposes to meet Ministers of the Government of the Republic of Ireland to discuss the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I expect to discuss security matters with Irish Ministers at the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference within the next few weeks.

Political Parties (Discussions)

19. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of talks with the political parties about a local administration for the Province.

25. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent discussions he has had with representatives of the political parties in the Province.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook).

Cross-community Activities

20. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schools, youth and community groups are engaged in cross-community activities; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Uptake under the cross-community contact scheme has grown progressively since its introduction in 1987 and today over one-third of all Northern Ireland schools—about 450 schools—and 300 youth or community groups are participating in joint programmes. The budget for the present financial year is £500,000.

Unemployment

21. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest available unemployment figures for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: At 10 January 1991 there were 98,268 unemployed claimants in the Province representing 14·1 per cent. of the workforce.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

22. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent meetings he has had with Irish Ministers to discuss the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Matters arising under the Anglo-Irish Agreement continue to be discussed within the framework of the regular meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference. The last conference meeting was on January 31.

Business Expansion

24. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what effect terrorist destruction of businesses will have on Government plans for business expansion in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Terrorist destruction of businesses will obviously make the promotion of Northern Ireland as an investment location more difficult in overseas markets by heightening potential investors' concern about security. This is particularly disappointing after a period when investment in the Province has been very encouraging.

Common Agricultural Policy

27. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact on the Northern Ireland agriculture industry of the recent proposed reforms of the common agriculture policy by the Commission of the European Communities.

Mr. Hanley: The impact on Northern Ireland agriculture cannot be assessed until the European Commission tables detailed proposals. I am not therefore in a position to make a statement at this stage.

Small Businesses

28. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the creation of small businesses in the Province.

Mr. Needham: Information on the number of small businesses created is not available. However VAT registration provide a useful indicator of the numbers of businesses created and in the five-year period from 1985 to 1989 an estimated 18,000 businesses registered for VAT in Northern Ireland. While VAT registration relate to businesses of all sizes the vast majority fall within the small

business category. In the same period 9,352 people became self-employed under the Training and Employment Agency's enterprise allowance scheme. Since 1986, LEDU has provided assistance to 2,009 new businesses under its enterprise grant scheme.

Further Education

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of persons in Northern Ireland in full or part-time education who will have their 19th birthday during the current school year.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest available figures show that for the 1989-90 school year there were 5,480 full-time and 3,407 part-time 19-year-old students.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the full-time equivalent staffing level in each of the further education colleges in Northern Ireland during the academic year 1989-90;

(2) what was the full-time equivalent student enrolment to each of the further education colleges in Northern Ireland during the academic year 1989-90.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Further education college	*Staff Full-time equivalent lecturers*	*Enrolments Full-time equivalent students*
Belfast College of Technology	289	3,017
Belfast College of Business Studies	138	1,938
Rupert Stanley College	287	3,866
North-West College	207	2,669
Fermanagh	89	994
Limavady	72	752
Omagh	101	990
Antrim	47	529
Ballymena	133	1,597
Newtownabbey	142	1,561
North Antrim	39	429
Coleraine	75	941
Magherafelt	50	593
Larne	59	503
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College	22	199
Lisburn	123	1,247
Down	92	1,049
Newcastle	45	577
Castlereagh	107	1,238
North Down	182	1,940
Lurgan	69	814
Portadown	124	1,502
Armagh	94	1,092
Banbridge	45	528
East Tyrone	89	1,019
Newry/Kilkeel	129	1,502

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total recurrent budget for each of the further education colleges in Northern Ireland during the academic year 1989-90.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not held centrally for individual further education colleges and will have to be obtained from the education and library boards. I will write to the hon. Gentleman when the information is to hand and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Leisure Facilities

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the district council leisure facilities in Northern Ireland from which his Department is seeking to collect rates.

Mr. Needham: The list set out below shows the better known council leisure facilities on which rates are collected.

Preparation of a definitive list would be a most time-consuming exercise and could be prepared only at disproportionate cost.

List of leisure facilities on which rates are collected for all or part of the hereditament

Donard Ward 12 Central Promenade Newcastle BT33 0DJ	Down district council	Tourist centre
Andersonstown Ward 128 Andersonstown Road Belfast BT11 2BX	Belfast city council	Andersonstown leisure centre
Whiterock Ward 339-445 Falls Road Belfast BT12 6FD	Belfast city council	Beechmount leisure centre
Shaftesbury Ward 30-32 Bedford Street Belfast BT2 7FF	Belfast city council	Ulster hall hall and flat
Corrody Ward 20 Victoria Road Londonderry BT47 2NR	Derry city council	Recreation centre
University Ward 2 University Road Coleraine BT52 1RR	Coleraine borough council	Marina, caravans, site and amenities
Royal Portrush Ward 3-4 Harbour Road Portrush BTT56 8DF	Coleraine borough council	Leisure complex
Hawthorne Ward 385 Doagh Road Newtownabbey	Newtownabbey borough council	Playing fields and outbuildings
M1 Rogers Quay Belfast Road Carrickfergus	Carrickfergus borough council	Marina
Harbour Ward M1 Quay Street Bangor	North Down borough council	Marina
Drumgor Ward 2 Lakeview Road Craigavon BT64 1AL	Craigavon borough council	Civic centre
Ballyhanwood Ward 111 Old Dundonald Road Belfast	Castlereagh borough council	Leisure centre

Councillors

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Nothern Ireland if he will list all councillors who have been absent from council and committee meetings for more than two months since the local government election in May 1989; how many exceeded three months; how many were disqualified; and what was their party affiliation and the council to which they belonged.

Mr. Needham: Information about the attendance record of councillors is a matter for individual councils.

Council Committees

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Nothern Ireland which councils in Northern Ireland conduct business through committees; and which of these councils form committees which are *(a)* as proportional to party strengths as is possible, *(b)* largely proportional or *(c)* non-proportional.

Mr. Needham: Twenty councils conduct business through committees. Information about representation in proportion to party strengths on such committees is not available in the form requested. Party representation can vary, either by design or choice, from committee to committee within some councils.

Housing, Belfast

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Nothern Ireland how many houses have been rehabilitated by *(a)* the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and *(b)* housing associations in each housing district in Belfast in each of the years from 1979 to 1991.

Mr. Needham: *(a)* This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I have been advised by the chief executive that the information is not readily available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(b) The numbers of dwellings rehabilitated by registered housing associations for the period 1979-80 to 1990-91 are as follows:

Belfast Housing Districts

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1979-80	6	—	2	20	4	—	28
1980-81	30	28	—	—	31	23	45
1981-82	12	51	—	19	12	5	78
1982-83	1	30	—	22	35	24	62
1983-84	1	64	4	—	45	17	83
1984-85	—	105	5	63	15	45	78
1985-86	—	34	3	—	27	3	123
1986-87	—	45	22	19	26	32	149
1987-88	—	81	2	29	119	24	33
1988-89	—	27	—	—	26	14	20
1989-90	—	9	—	1	—	18	13
1990-91[1]	1	17	—	—	23	2	21

[1] Figures for 1990-91 are for the period April 1990-January 1991

Robberies and Burglaries

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many robberies and burglaries were reported during the month of January in and around the vicinity of Millisle village, Co. Down; how many of these incidents involved the use of firearms; and if he will make a statement on the police presence at this location.

Dr. Mawhinney: In January 1991 two burglaries and one robbery in Millisle were reported to the RUC. A firearm was used in the robbery. Millisle area is policed from Donaghadee, approximately two miles away. Mobile patrols cover the area on a 24-hour basis and foot patrols operate in the village.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on discussions between the environment ministers at the recent Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Needham: I had discussions with the Irish Minister for the Environment, Mr. Padraig Flynn TD, at the conference on 31 January. Among the topics on which we exchanged views were hazardous waste disposal, road improvements and the management of water resources.

Sinn Fein

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy that Sinn Fein will not be invited to participate in any talks on the future of Northern Ireland until such time as the IRA unconditionally surrenders and dissociates itself from armed struggle and there is verifiable evidence that the IRA has laid down its weapons and destroyed its terrorist arsenal.

Mr. Brooke: So long as Sinn Fein endorses violence the Government will not engage with it as though it were a normal democratic party.

Dundonald Ice Bowl

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what values of rates have been paid in connection with Dundonald International Ice Bowl in each of the past five years.

Mr. Needham: The amount of rates paid on Dundonald International Ice Bowl during 1990-91 was £144,231·00. No payments were made in previous years.

Blood Products

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people with haemophilia in Northern Ireland who require factor VIII infusions are being treated with the high-purity monoclonal products; how many are being treated with the intermediate purity concentrates; if he will break the figures down by product manufacturer; if he will break the figures down in terms of the number of units of each product prescribed in the latest year for which data are available; and if he will break down the figures for each health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 7 February 1991]:* The available information is as follows. In 1989 three patients who were allergic to intermediate purity Factor VIII were treated with 34,210 units of high purity monoclonal products manufactured by Baxter Health Care Ltd. In the same year approximately 100 patients were treated with intermediate purity Factor VIII concentrate manufactured by the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (1·6 million units) and by Alphatherapeutic (UK) Ltd. (1·6

million units). As treatment for haemophilia patients in Northern Ireland is provided on a regional basis at the Royal Victoria hospital the figures for each health and social services board are not readily available.

SCOTLAND

Clinical Physics and Bioengineering

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the numbers on each part of the medical technical officer grade for those administered from the Department of Clinical Physics and Bioengineering, West Graham street, Glasgow; and what are the equivalent figures for those staff in Lothian, Fife, Grampian and Tayside health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is shown in the table:

Medical Technical Officer in Medical Physics WTE at 30 September 1990[1]

Grade	*Glasgow*	*Fife*	*Grampian*	*Lothian*	*Tayside*
5	5·0	—	—	7·0	1·0
4	12·0	—	3·0	12·0	7·0
3	47·6	—	9·0	28·0	8·0
2	30·6	—	3·6	17·1	15·0
1	11·0	—	1·3	6·0	7·0
Trainee	6·0	—	1·0	1·0	3·0
Assistant	1·0	—	—	—	—
Total	113·2	—	17·9	71·1	41·1

[1] Provisional.

Farming

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent assessment has been made of the effect of current interest rates on the farming industry in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department estimates that in 1990 interest payments by farmers for current farming purposes amounted to £116·4 million. Details are in "Scottish Agriculture—Output Input and Income Statistics, January 1991", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement explaining the delay in setting the levels of hill livestock compensatory allowances for 1991;

(2) what plans he has to provide financial assistance to the hill livestock industry in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's reply on 11 February to the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller). The increase in rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances announced by my right hon. Friend will add a further £7 million to the £48 million which we pay annually to more than 18,000 Scottish producers. Every effort will be made to make these payments quickly. Other assistance is available under a range of agricultural support schemes, notably the sheep annual premium and the suckler cow premium, which together with the HLCA scheme now provide over £100 million a year to Scottish hill livestock farmers.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of full-time farmers in Scotland whose businesses have failed financially in each of the years since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No comprehensive information is available relating to financial failure of farm businesses in Scotland. The only available data of relevance are numbers of farmers declared bankrupt. The annual recorded information on such bankruptcies since 1986—the first year for which the data are likely to be complete—is shown in the table:

	Number of farmers
1986	26
1987	36
[1]1988	13
[1]1989	17

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet his EC counterparts to discuss the future of the hill livestock industry in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend is always represented at discussions in the Agriculture Council about matters which affect livestock farmers in Scotland.

Fishing

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish Fishermen's Federation to discuss changes in net sizes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My noble Friend met the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on a number of occasions towards the end of last year, including at the December Fisheries Council. A number of issues were discussed at these meetings including possible changes in mesh size. We are currently consulting the industry over a package of improved technical conservation measures proposed for introduction in the North sea and west coast of Scotland this year. These measures include the introduction of 90mm square mesh panels in current demersal fishing gear.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who will be appointed to the four regions of the Scottish Nature Conservancy Council; who will be their chairmen; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The appointment of chairmen and members to the regional committees of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland is a matter for the chairman and board to decide. I have asked the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February in Cardiff of the three chairmen of the Scottish, Welsh and English Nature Conservancy Councils at their joint committee session; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee is the statutory committee

through which the Nature Conservancy Councils for England and Scotland and the Countryside Council for Wales exercise their responsibilities on matters of national and international importance. The JNCC is required to make an annual report on its activities and place a copy in the House. The decision whether to publish or circulate minutes is a matter for the councils.

Small Landholders

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many claims for compensation in respect of resumptions by landlords have been made to the Scottish land court under the Small Landholders (Scotland) Acts 1886 to 1931 in each year since 1977.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows. There have been no further claims since 1986.

	Number
1977	1
1978	3
1979	2
1980	1
1981	—
1982	2
1983	2
1984	1
1985	—
1986	1

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many smallholdings, by district are rented under the Small Landholders (Scotland) Acts 1886 to 1931; and if he will bring forward proposals to extend them the same rights and protections provided to crofters by the Crofting Reform Act 1976.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information relating to holdings belonging to the Secretary of State is set out in the table. The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department does not hold details of holdings in private or commericial ownership.

My right hon. Friend has no plans to extend the provisions of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 1976 to non-crofting tenants.

Holdings on Secretary of State's non-crofting estates
As at 30 September 1990

Lowland estates	*Landhold*
Aberdeen	7
Ayr	1
Berwick	4
Dumfries	5
Kirkcudbright	1
Midlothian	5
Perth	2
Renfrew	1
Wigtown	2
TOTAL	28

Special Needs Training

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the amount of Training Agency expenditure on the (i) youth training scheme and (ii) employment training scheme for trainees with special needs for each of the Training Agency regions in Scotland for each month since September 1988.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not collected.

Hazardous Waste Inspectorate

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the recent activities of the hazardous waste inspectorate in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am pleased to say that a report of the hazardous waste inspectorate in Scotland has been published today. The report, which covers the period April 1987 to December 1990, outlines the activities and findings of the inspectorate and also sets out a number of conclusions and recommendations concerning waste management practices in Scotland. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

This report will be of interest to everyone who has a part to play in ensuring that waste management in Scotland is practised in a responsible and environmentally friendly manner. The findings of the inspectorate, which have been drawn from its surveys and visits over recent years, are discussed in the report. It concludes that whilst a general improvement in waste disposal practices is evident there is still scope for further improvement.

I welcome this report at a time when environmental issues are so high in the minds of everyone and commend its contents to the public and private sectors of the industry alike.

Education Spending

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will produce a table, both at cost and 1990-91 prices, showing what level of expenditure local government has incurred on education in every year since 1978-79 compared to what central Government had built into their assessed need to spend on education.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 8 February 1991]:* The information is as follows:

	(1) Expenditure in cash terms (£ million)	*(2) Expenditure at 1990-91 prices (£ million)*	*(3) Provision/GAE in cash terms (£ million)*	*(4) Provision/GAE at 1990-91 prices (£ million)*
1978-79	709·5	1,792·8	645·5	1,631·2
1979-80	830·7	1,799·1	736·0	1,594·0
1980-81	1,025·9	1,877·5	801·2	1,466·4
1981-82	1,155·5	1,928·6	1,021·8	1,705·4
1982-83	1,241·0	1,934·0	1,193·8	1,860·4
1983-84	1,309·6	1,950·6	1,237·0	1,842·5
1984-85	1,350·0	1,913·6	1,249·1	1,770·6
1985-86	1,391·9	1,871·0	1,297·3	1,743·9
1986-87	1,491·2	1,938·3	1,343·3	1,746·2

	(1) Expenditure in cash terms (£ million)	(2) Expenditure at 1990-91 prices (£ million)	(3) Provision/GAE in cash terms (£ million)	(4) Provision/GAE at 1990-91 prices (£ million)
1987-88	1,623·6	2,001·4	1,424·7	1,756·2
1988-89	1,764·2	2,026·8	1,676·0	1,925·5
1989-90	1,926·7	2,080·9	1,793·3	1,936·8
1990-91	2,097·1	2,097·1	1,973·1	1,973·1

Notes:
1. The Government no longer issue assessments of relative expenditure need and the figures for 1990-91 in columns (3) and (4) relate to grant aided expenditure (GAE).
2. In columns (3) and (4) the figures for the years 1978-79 to 1983-84 include provision for libraries and museums as well as education in accordance with the provision categorisation provided in the rate support grant orders.
3. Expenditure figures are at final outturn to 1988-89, provisional outturn for 1989-90 and budget estimate for 1990-91.
4. All years have been converted to 1990-91 prices by means of the Treasury GDP deflator (October 1990).

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average lapse of time between applications made for family credit and the determination thereof in the case of *(a)* claims made by people who have just started work, *(b)* renewal claims and *(c)* all claims.

Mr. Jack: For the 12 months ended December 1990, the available information on the basis requested is as follows:

(a) Claims made by people who have just started work
A fast-path arrangement is available for people who start work after being on unemployment benefit or income support. 88 per cent. of claims dealt with under this arrangement were cleared within five working days. Claims from those people who have just started work can not be identified separately from those of other claimants who have been in work for some time when they make their first claim. The average clearance time for *all* new claims was 21·5 working days.

(b) Renewal claims
The average clearance time was 19·3 working days.

(c) All claims
The average clearance time was 20·45 working days.

Disability

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of potential beneficiaries of the disability working allowance who will be excluded due to the capital limit.

Mr. Scott: It is not possible to estimate with confidence how many people will be excluded from receiving disability working allowance due to the capital limit.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the research project, Effect of the Actively Seeking Work Provisions, has been completed; and if he will publish the results.

Mr. Jack: The report on the research commissioned by the Department into the effects of the changes to unemployment benefits legislation operative from October 1989, including the introduction of the "actively seeking employment" condition, has not yet been completed. A copy of the report will, in due course, be placed in the Library.

Community Charge Benefit

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Lambeth have claimed community charge benefit based on claims for reimbursement by his Department.

Miss Widdecombe: As at 30 November 1990, 41,199 individual charge payers were receiving community charge benefit in the London borough of Lambeth. This figure is likely to underestimate the true position as the local authority still had to assess a number of unprocessed benefit claims.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the principal achievements of his Department since June 1987.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government have continued to commit greater resources than ever before to social security. In 1990-91 total social security spending will have been increased by nearly 41 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79. Specific improvements include extra help for less well-off families and elderly and disabled pensioners. By the end of 1990 over 4 million people had taken out a personal pension and contracted-out of the state earnings-related pension scheme. The new structure of income-related benefits introduced in 1988 enables additional resources to be targeted more effectively than under the old scheme and together with subsequent changes in the tax and national insurance systems has improved work incentives by significantly reducing the worst effects of the poverty and unemployment traps. The recent White Paper "Children Come First" has set out the Government's proposals for a new system of child maintenance in the United Kingdom and the new disability benefits announced in the White Paper "The Way Ahead" are planned to come into operation in April 1992.

Further increases in benefit rates, including child benefit, from April 1991 will bring total expenditure on social security to well over £60 billion a year, reflecting our firm commitment to protect the value of the national insurance pension and to focus extra help on those most in need, such as the less well-off pensioners and families with children, disabled people and carers.

The Department of Social Security is well advanced in its programme of establishing executive agencies. The Resettlement Agency and the Information Technology Services Agency are already in place, and the Contributions Agency and the Benefits Agency—the

largest "next steps" agency—are to be established in April 1991. In early 1993 we expect to launch the Child Support Agency. The DSS computerisation programme—one of the largest in the world—is well advanced.

Commitment to improve service to the public continues. For example, clearance times for income support are significantly better than those for its predecessor, supplementary benefit. The relocation of benefits work from some London offices to areas where staff recruitment and retention are easier has also improved service to the public. Plans are well advanced to relocate some 800 DSS headquarters' posts from London and the south east to Leeds by 1992, which will play an important part in the Government's inner cities initiative.

Retired People (Earnings)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many United Kingdom retired people *(a)* overall and *(b)* as a proportion of the total retired population received weekly incomes from all sources above the average of those in work in the last year for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1987 approximately half a million (or eight per cent. of) retired pensioner units (ie married couples or singles) are estimated to have an income above the average for all benefit units with at least one working adult. It should be noted that between 1979 and 1987 the incomes of pensioners rose twice as fast as those of the rest of the population.

Note: Income has been equivalised to allow for differences in family size. Retired pensioner units are those where the head is over state pension age and works less than 16 hours per week. Other (non-retired) pensioner units are included with the benefit units containing at least one working adult. A benefit unit is a family group assessed for benefit ie singles or couples with or without children. The data source is the 1987 Family Expenditure Survey.

Residential Homes

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce legislation to enable residents of local authority residential homes for the elderly to receive the same amount of benefit as those in private and voluntary sector homes; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so.

The care in the Community proposals from April 1993 will encourage local authorities to consider making use of the independent sector when placing people in residential homes.

War Widows

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many war widows are currently receiving children's allowances; and for how many children;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that there is no further reduction in the combined value of children's allowances and child benefit for war widows' children;

(3) what is the annual loss to a war widow with one, or two or three children respectively, resulting from the decision not to maintain the real value of war widows' children's allowances and child benefit since November 1979;

(4) what was the outcome of his consideration of the issues relating to war widows' children's allowances mentioned in the adjournment debate on child dependency additions on 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *142-46*.

Mr. Jack: The disposable income available to war widows and their families has benefited substantially from this Government's policies. Child allowances are only one element in a structure of benefit payments with levels set above those for other widows on pensions.

Virtually all war widows receiving children's allowances, being "post-1973" war widows are also likely to be receiving children's pensions from the Ministry of Defence under the armed forces pension scheme. This Government have made several significant improvements to the overall position of war widows. The hon. Member will be aware from my reply to him on 28 January 1991 at colums *440-42* that in 1979 war widows' pensions were made tax free; in 1984 a new tier of age allowance was introduced for those over 80; in 1988 the disregard on war pensions for income-related benefits was increased to £5 and to £10 in 1990. In 1990 pre-1973 war widows were awarded special payments of £40 a week. These, too, were tax free and are also totally disregarded for the purpose of calculating entitlement to income-related benefits. Also, in April 1990 war widows' age allowances were increased by more than the rate of inflation. Both war widows' children's allowances and war widows' pensions have consistently been set at preferential rates compared to those applicable to national insurance widows and children.

We will continue to uprate the basic war widows' children's allowance by the increase in the RPI, deducting any overlapping cash increase in child benefit, using the formula introduced by the last Labour Government in order to safeguard war widows against the loss of tax allowances during the phasing in of child benefit.

The number of war widows' children's allowance in payment is about 2,500; information on the number of war widows receiving them is not readily available.

The combined values of war widows' children's allowance and child benefit at current prices and at the values as they would have been had this been uprated in line with movements in the retail prices index are as shown in the tables:

One child

A Uprating date[1]	B Value of child benefit plus children's allowance £	C Value if uprated in line with movements in retail prices index[2] £	D Difference between A and B (weekly loss) £	E Total loss over period between uprating dates[3] £
November 1979	14·00	—	—	—
November 1980	15·35	16·14	·79	41·28
November 1981	16·10	18·08	1·98	102·74
November 1982	17·10	19·21	2·11	109·54
November 1983	17·45	20·14	2·69	139·73
November 1984	17·90	21·13	3·23	168·09
November 1985	18·55	22·29	3·74	130·79
July 1986	18·65	22·66	4·01	140·28
April 1987	18·85	23·65	4·80	249·78
April 1988	19·25	24·58	5·33	277·31
April 1989	19·85	26·56	6·71	348·81
April 1990	20·65	29·07	8·42	437·69

Two children

A Uprating date[1]	B Value of child benefit plus children's allowance £	C Value if uprated in line with movements in retail prices index[2] £	D Difference between A and B (weekly loss) £	E Total loss over period between uprating dates[3] £
November 1979	28·00	—	—	—
November 1980	30·70	32·29	1·59	82·56
November 1981	32·20	36·15	3·95	205·48
November 1982	34·20	38·41	4·21	219·08
November 1983	34·90	40·27	5·37	279·46
November 1984	35·80	42·27	6·47	336·18
November 1985	37·10	44·57	7·47	261·58
July 1986	37·30	45·32	8·02	280·56
April 1987	37·70	47·31	9·61	499·55
April 1988	38·50	49·17	10·67	554·61
April 1989	39·70	53·12	13·42	697·61
April 1990	41·30	58·13	16·83	875·39

Three children

A Uprating date[1]	B Value of child benefit plus children's allowance £	C Value if uprated in line with movements in retail prices index[2] £	D Difference between A and B (weekly loss) £	E Total loss over period between uprating dates[3] £
November 1979	42·00	—	—	—
November 1980	46·05	48·43	2·38	123·85
November 1981	48·30	54·23	5·93	308·21
November 1982	51·30	57·62	6·32	328·62
November 1983	52·35	60·41	8·06	419·20
November 1984	53·70	63·40	9·70	504·27
November 1985	55·65	66·86	11·21	392·38
July 1986	55·95	67·97	12·02	420·84
April 1987	56·55	70·96	14·41	749·33
April 1988	57·75	73·75	16·00	831·92
April 1989	59·55	79·67	20·12	1,046·42
April 1990	61·95	87·20	25·25	1,313·08

Notes:

[1] Uprating dates refer to the children's allowance. For all but the first date they are also the uprating dates for child benefit.

[2] Values of child benefit plus children's allowance as they would have been had they been uprated in line with movements in the retail prices index between uprating dates.

[3] The period between uprating dates is taken as 52 weeks except for the periods from November 1985 and July 1986 for which the relevant number of weeks is 35.

Severe Weather Payments

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the location of points used for the measuring of the temperatures in the United Kingdom for the purposes of triggering special severe weather payments since 1986.

Mr. Scott: Temperatures are measured at the national climatological message (MCM) stations. These are listed in the schedules to the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations 1981 and the schedules to the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Regulations 1988, copies of which are in the Library.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total amount paid since 1986 as severe weather payments; and if he will list these by local office.

Mr. Scott: The available information is in the table. Details of the payments for each local office for 1986-87 and 1987-88 are in the Library. For 1988-89, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 5 December 1989 at column *157*.

Information for each local office for 1989-90 and 1990-91 is not currently available, but will be placed in the Library in due course.

	£
Exceptionally cold weather payments	
1986-87	10,201,860
1987-88	496,798
Social fund cold weather payments	
1988-89	2,510
1989-90	406,481
Total	11,107,649

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of applications refused by each DSS office for payment of severe weather allowances since 1986.

Mr. Scott: Details of exceptionally cold weather payments for each local office for the winters of 1986-87 and 1987-88 are in the Library.

In 1988-89 Social Fund cold weather payments were made only for the area covered by the Department's local office at Galashiels where 174 claims were refused because the eligibility criteria for the payments were not fulfilled. There were 502 successful claims.

Information on refusals for each local office for 1989-90 and for 1990-91 is not currently available, but will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to advertise the application forms for special cold weather payments in the appropriate local newspapers.

Mr. Scott: When a weather station triggers, local offices linked with it have been instructed to place an advertisement in the local press. This advertisement includes a claim form for a cold weather payment.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all those social security offices which advertised the application forms for special cold weather payments in their appropriate local newspapers.

Mr. Scott: All social security offices have been instructed to advertise, and are in the process of doing so.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will instruct all local social security offices to advertise the application forms for special cold weather payments in their appropriate local newspapers.

Mr. Scott: On 8 February all social security offices were instructed to place such advertisements in appropriate local newspapers.

Local Offices, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to formulate and announce plans to alter the provision and location of offices and counter services for social security in the Cardiff area.

Miss Widdecombe: In April 1991 the Barry, Cardiff West, Cardiff East and Cardiff Central offices will combine to form the South Glamorgan district and will be managed as a single unit. The senior management team for this project has recently been appointed, and one of their priorities will be to draw up detailed plans to provide the best possible service to local customers. There will be the widest possible consultation with Members of Parliament, and with local statutory and voluntary organisations. There are no plans to close offices in the Cardiff area.

Bari Harbour

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many appeals have been made to the north west of England pensions appeal tribunal involving cases arising from the Bari harbour mustard gas disaster in 1943; and how many of them have been successful;

(2) pursuant to his reply of 4 February, *Official Report*, col. *63-64*, what gave rise to the special exercise in 1986-87 to trace cases of casualties caused by the Bari harbour mustard gas disaster in 1943; how this exercise was carried out; how many new cases arose from the exercise; how many of these were successful; and if he has any plans to conduct a similar special exercise;

(3) pursuant to his reply of 4 February, *Official Report*, column 63, when the first claim for a war pension arising out of the Bari harbour incident in 1943 was made; and when the last one was made.

Miss Widdecombe: The special exercise was undertaken following the exceptional decision to backdate the payment of war disablement pension to an individual who had been exposed to mustard gas whilst serving in the Royal Navy at Bari harbour in 1943. He claimed a war pension in 1983 and contended that he would have claimed earlier had he been aware of the precise nature of the substance with which he had been contaminated.

The purpose of the special exercise was to identify other casualties of the incident in order to establish whether similar action was appropriate. The names of the casualties of the Bari harbour incident were obtained from Ministry of Defence and Department of Health and Social Security records. A press notice announcing the exercise was issued and as a result of this 87 new claims for war pension were received of which 33 were successful, bringing the total number of claims arising from the incident to 185, of which 106 have been successful. All awards for exposure to mustard gas at Bari harbour were

reviewed to see whether backdating was appropriate. The exercise confirmed that all but one of those traced were aware at the time of the incident that they had been exposed to mustard gas. Little purpose would therefore be served by conducting a similar exercise.

The first claim for war pension as a result of the Bari harbour incident was made in 1943. Information is not available regarding the date on which the last claim was made nor on the number of appeals that have been made to the north-west of England pensions appeal tribunal.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the firms and trade organisations the deregulation unit consulted over their new legislation on statutory sick pay and the outcome of these consultations.

Mr. Scott: Following the introduction of the Statutory Sick Pay Bill on 8 November 1990, a copy of the Bill and press release were sent to all employers and organisations represented on the Department's employers panel. Subsequently, Ministers and/or officials have discussed the proposals with the Confederation of British Industry, the National Federation of the Self Employed and Small Businesses, the Forum of Private Businesses and the National Farmers Union. In addition, Ministers have responded to some 200 written representations, mainly from hon. Members on behalf of employers and their organisations.

The Government have introduced a scheme for small employers' relief to assist small employers with the cost of the statutory sick pay changes.

Banks

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will seek to introduce legislation to control bank charges on retail transactions.

Mr. Maples: I have been asked to reply.

The Government see no need to introduce legislation to control the level of bank charges. These are commercial decisions for the banks and subject to competition.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will propose legislation to open bank operations to competition and scrutiny by bodies representing consumers' and clients' associations.

Mr. Maples: I have been asked to reply.

Banks are already subject to competition and scrutiny by consumer bodies.

WALES

Educational Psychologists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each education authority in Wales for the financial year 1991-92 the specific grant to be paid by his Department for each trainee educational psychologist to pursue the post-graduate course enabling them to satisfy the criteria for employment as educational psychologists in local authorities.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Allocations under the grants for educational support and training programme have been made available as set out in the following table. This covers ongoing commitments for the 1991-92 from the 1990-91 financial year and that part of new initial training activity falling within 1991-92.

	£
Clwyd	39,600
Dyfed	29,200
Gwent	8,000
Gwynedd	20,000
Mid Glamorgan	52,900
West Glamorgan	39,300

No bids were received from Powys and South Glamorgan local education authorities.

Employment Training

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many places were offered annually under the employment training scheme since its founding; and how many of these positions have been filled by trainees with special needs.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of employment training places offered annually in Wales is as follows:

Some 22,300 between September 1988 and March 1989.
Some 15,200 in 1989-90.
Some 13,400 in 1990-91.

These figures relate to locally contracted provision only. Figures for nationally contracted places are not available on a regional basis.

Since the introduction of the programme in Wales, people with disabilities have accounted for 12 per cent. of starts and those requiring literacy and numeracy training 16 per cent. of starts.

A487, Gwynedd

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the starting date for the construction of the Felinheli bypass on the A487 trunk road in Gwynedd; and if he will list all causes of delay with regard to this scheme since it was first placed in the Welsh trunk roads preparation pool.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Inclusion of a scheme in the trunk road programme indicates that a road improvement is needed—it does not convey any commitment as to timing. This depends on satisfactory completion of engineering design and statutory procedures; and on scheme priorities in relation to the finance available. The Felinheli—Port Dinorwic—bypass is expected to start in period up to April 1994. Objections to supplementary orders published late last year are under consideration and provisional arrangements are being made for a public inquiry in mid-1991.

Mental Illness

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many places there were in day centres in Wales for mentally ill people in 1989; and what was the corresponding figure for 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There were 935 places in day centres in Wales for mentally ill people at 31 March 1989. The corresponding figure for 31 March 1979 was 393.

Music (Grants)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been paid out of Welsh Office funds by way of grant or subsidy in Wales during the past 12 months to support *(a)* orchestral music, *(b)* opera, *(c)* choral music, *(d)* brass bands, *(e)* folk music and *(f)* rock music.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Government financial support for the performing arts in Wales is channelled through the Welsh Arts Council which receives its funding from my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts via the Arts Council of Great Britain. There has been no separate Welsh Office support for such activities save for the £842,000 which we announced on 31 January had been transferred from our existing provision to the Office of Arts and Libraries to write off the accumulated deficit of the Welsh National Opera.

Physiotherapists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many trained physiotherapists there are currently employed by the national health service in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: At 30 September 1990 there were 766—a whole-time equivalent of 597·4—trained physiotherapists employed by the NHS in Wales.

Residential Homes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many places there were available in Wales in residential homes in 1988; what were the corresponding figures for 1978; and how many were *(a)* local authority homes, *(b)* registered homes run by voluntary organisations and *(c)* registered homes run by private owners.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There were 17,836 places available in local authority, private and voluntary residential homes for elderly, younger physically handicapped, blind, mentally ill, mentally handicapped and alcohol dependent people at 31 March 1988. The corresponding figure at 31 March 1978 was 10,750. The number of local authority homes, registered homes run by voluntary organisations and registered homes run by private owners is shown in the table:

Function of home	*1978*[1]			*1988*[1]		
	Local authority homes	*Voluntary homes*	*Private homes*	*Local authority homes*	*Voluntary homes*	*Private homes*
Elderly, younger physically handicapped and blind	201	93[2]		201	36	421
Mentally ill	37	1	5	53	4	19
Mentally handicapped	29	2	6	90	19	42
Mixed[3]	13	0	0	1	0	0
Alcohol dependence	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	0	3	0

[1] As at 31 March.
[2] No split available between voluntary and private.
[3] These homes accommodate both mentally ill and mentally handicapped people.
[4] Not available.

Welsh Language Bill

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when he intends to publish his draft Welsh Language Bill;

(2) when he plans to place legislation before the House to enact a new Welsh Language Bill;

(3) what is his response to the draft Welsh Language Bill published on 14 February by the Welsh Language Board.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Language Board published its proposals for legislation in support of the Welsh language on 11 February. Those proposals will be carefully considered and the Government's response will be announced in due course.

Coal Industry (Redundancies)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what special measures he plans to take to deal with the consequences of redundancies in the coal industry in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office and other agencies will respond swiftly to opportunities as they arise.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the redundancies effected and declared in the coal industry in south Wales since 1 January 1990, indicating the measures he has taken to ameliorate their impact upon communities.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 1 January 1990 there have been 880 redundancies effected and 705 redundancies announced in the coal industry in south Wales. The Welsh Office, Welsh Development Agency, British Coal Enterprise, other agencies and Government Departments are working together and are responding to opportunities as they arise to offset the effects that the redundancies have on local communities.

New Crown Buildings

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for utilising the space at the New Crown buildings, Cathays park, after its evacuation by the Export Credit Guarantees Department insurance services group.

Mr. David Hunt: It is expected to be some time before the space now occupied by ECGD insurance services group in the new Crown building, Cathays park, becomes vacant. The reletting of this space, which forms part of the Government's civil estate, is ultimately the responsibility

of the Department of Environment—Property Holdings—but my Department will be keeping in close touch with events.

Education Department (Location)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the future office location of the Education Department of the Welsh Office.

Mr. David Hunt: At present, none.

Leybucht Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his reply of 12 November 1990, *Official Report*, column 49, when he will place in the Library an authorised English language version of the Advocate-General's opinion on the Leybucht bay case heard at Luxembourg before the European Court of Justice.

Mr. David Hunt: An English language version of the Advocate-General's opinion prepared by the court is unlikely to be available for some time. However, I understand that an English language translation prepared by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be available very shortly. I shall be placing a copy of this in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline his policy on setting targets for the numbers of those in training who obtain qualifications; and if he will give the reasons underlying the policy.

Mr. Jackson: Targets for the numbers of employment training and youth training trainees who are expected to obtain national vocational qualifications at various levels are negotiated between my Department and individual training and enterprise councils. Targets are influenced by, amongst other things, past performance, expected improvements in performance and local circumstances.

Action Credit

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what impact the earnings paid to participants in the action credit pilot scheme being run by the employment service will have on their *(a)* entitlement to housing benefit, *(b)* entitlement to community charge benefit, and *(c)* entitlement to income support during (i) the time that they are building up their terminal commission bonus and (ii) when they receive their accumulated bonus at the end of the action credit; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The action credit scheme was recently piloted by the Department of Employment's training, enterprise and education directorate (formerly the Training Agency) for people leaving employment training who are receiving income support.

Under the scheme, participants who take up part-time work placements receive payments equal to the level of their income support earnings disregard, normally £5 or £15 per week. These earnings have no effect on entitlement to income support, housing benefit or community charge benefit.

The balance of the earnings is accumulated and paid at a later date. Any income support in payment is reduced by the net weekly equivalent of the earnings, after deducting a further earnings disregard, for a forward period equal to the length of the period of employment. Housing benefit and community charge benefit are not affected.

If income support is not in payment, or is extinguished by the earnings, the accumulated bonus is treated as capital for the purposes of housing benefit and community charge benefit. It will only affect those benefits if the payment takes any existing capital over £3,000, of if the participant's capital is already over that amount.

Unemployment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons in the United Kingdom have been unemployed for *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years, *(c)* three years, *(d)* three to five years and *(e)* over five years.

Mr. Jackson: The information is contained in the following table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database system in the House of Commons Library.

Duration	[1] *Total*
0-1 year	1,162,879
1-2 years	202,631
2-3 years	80,374
3-5 years	81,304
5 years or more	143,432

[1] Unemployment figures by duration are produced quarterly. The figures shown are for October 1990, the latest date available, and are on the unadjusted basis.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives he is considering in order to reduce long-term unemployment within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: We already have in place a comprehensive package of employment and training measures to help the long-term unemployed back into work. The range of help available for individuals is the widest ever. Next year we shall be providing up to 100,000 additional opportunities through programmes such as jobclub and the job interview guarantee.

Labour Statistics

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress the employment service has made in meeting the numerical targets outlined in its 1990-91 agency agreement; and if he will show the specific targets and achievements for the latest available date in relation to *(a)* placing unemployed people in jobs, *(b)* placing the long-term unemployed in jobs and *(c)* the number of claims not pursued; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Employment service targets for placing people into jobs this financial year are set out in the annual performance agreement published in April 1990. I am informed by the chief executive of the employment service that in the period April to December 1990 the employment service placed 1,088,286 unemployed people into jobs (annual target 1,650,000), of whom 165,400 had been

claiming benefit for six months or longer (annual target 275,000). Over the same period 320,034 people enquired at local offices of the employment service about entitlement to benefit but did not pursue a claim (reference level 400,000 in 1989-90 financial year). The chief executive will report to the Secretary of State on employment service achievements at the end of the financial year and his report will be published in the summer.

Annual Performance Agreement

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he intends to place in the Library a copy of the new annual performance agreement agreed with the employment service for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Discussions on the 1991-92 annual performance agreement are well advanced. I intend to place a copy in the Library by the beginning of April.

Part-time Work

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he intends to ratify EC directive 1983-90 on part-time work.

Mr. Forth: The draft directives on part-time work are still under discussion in the European Council.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed claimants in each month since 9 October 1989, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole *(a)* have been issued with a warning letter for not actively seeking work, *(b)* had their claims referred to an adjudication officer for not actively seeking work, *(c)* had their claims (i) allowed or (ii) disallowed, *(d)* have been referred to an adjudication officer for refusing employment; how many of those in *(d)* have had their benefit (1) disqualified or (2) allowed; how many have been referred to an adjudication officer for neglect to avail oneself of employment; and how many of those have had their benefit *(a)* disqualified or *(b)* allowed.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the employment service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his reply of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *90*, what consultations he has had with the chairman of South Glamorgan TEC concerning the issuing of advertisements to tender for the construction of the new TEC building.

Mr. Jackson: I have had no such consultations.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines he has issued to the training and enterprise councils concerning advertising for senior management positions.

Mr. Jackson: TECs have been issued with a staffing manual which sets out certain procedures which they are required to observe. This includes the obligation to advertise openly the post of chief executive should a TEC not wish to appoint an Employment Department group secondee.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines he has issued to the training and enterprise councils regarding the employment of close relatives of TEC chairmen in senior management positions.

Mr. Jackson: No specific guidance has been issued.

DEFENCE

Transmitter, Scotland

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the plans for an experimental extremely low frequency transmitter in Scotland.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We have reassessed this project in the light of current defence requirements and have decided not to proceed with the programme to construct an experimental transmitter in Glengarry forest. Accordingly, we shall not be proceeding with the notice of proposed development. We are notifying local authorities to this effect.

Gulf War

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people from the Paisley, South constituency are currently on military service in the Gulf or engaged in support services in this country.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government's war aims encompass the bombing of any non-Iraqi vehicles on the main Iraq-Jordan highway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The Government's objectives are those set out in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. The allied intention is to implement these resolutions in the shortest possible time with the minimum casualties. Allied pilots have instructions only to attack military targets which could pose a threat to allied forces or facilities which are supporting Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the delay experienced by Mrs. Joan Webb of Leicester in communicating with her son Colin Webb of the Signals Regiment at BFPO 649; what is the length of time now taken to transmit mail to services personnel in the Gulf; and what further measures he is taking to improve the situation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman has been in contact with my office about a delay experienced by Mrs. Joan Wells in communicating with her son in the Gulf. The matter is being investigated, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

In general, the transmit time to the Gulf for letters is around five days, and ten days for parcels. These timings may be exceeded for troops in forward positions.

Transit times are monitored regularly and every effort is made to achieve the earliest possible delivery.

Nulear Test Veterans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his current assessment of the effects on British service men present in the vicinity of the second United Kingdom nuclear test at Christmas Island in 1958 of their exposure to radiation;

(2) what is his current assessment of the effects on ex-service men present in the vicinity of the first United Kingdom nuclear test at Christmas Island in 1958 of their exposure to radiation.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now estimate the number of premature deaths of ex-service men who took part in the Christmas Island tests between 1952 and 1958, including the clean up operations up to 1964.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the National Radiological Protection Board report NRPB-R214, "Mortality and Cancer Incidence in UK Participants in UK Atmospheric Nuclear Weapon Tests and Experimental Programmes" published in 1988. In their report, the NRBP did not establish a causal link between any increased incidence of cancer and participation in the test programme.

The NRPB are now carrying out an analysis of data received up until 1 January 1988 and their further report will be available in 1992.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now reconsider the benefit and compensation claims of nuclear test veterans who took part in the British nuclear test programme from 1952 until 1958, including the clean-up programme up to 1964; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government's policy is based on the National Radiological Protection Board's (NRPB) report published in 1988, which found no casual link between participation in the test programme and any increased incidence of cancer. A further follow-up study by the NRPB has been commissioned and it will be necessary to await the conclusions of this before considering what changes, if any, might be appropriate to the Government's current policy.

Arms Fair, Baghdad

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations Her Majesty's Government received opposing British involvement in the first Baghdad international arms fair held in April 1989.

Mr. Alan Clark: A number of hon. Members and members of the public registered their opposition to the participation of United Kingdom companies in the international arms fair held in Baghdad in April 1989.

Gulf Crisis (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his American counterpart concerning the conditions under which United States forces in the allied military alliance deployed in the Gulf region would be permitted to use nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend keeps in regular contact with his American counterpart. The details of these discussions are confidential. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the Government's position on the possible use of United Kingdom nuclear weapons in the Gulf quite clear on 15 January 1991 at col. 726.

Quality Assurance

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimate of the cost of moving the Directorate General of Quality Assurance to *(a)* Stockton-on-Tees and *(b)* Portland, in Dorset.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Studies have yet to be completed.

Forces Personnel

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Royal Air Force and *(c)* Army personnel were (i) absent without leave and (ii) applied for discharge as conscientious objectors between 1 January and the latest available date; what were the figures for the comparable period of 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 15 February 1991

ENERGY

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimates he has available to him of the effect on potential first-time share buyers of the use of well-known recent television series characters in the flotation advertising campaigns for the electricity *(a)* distribution and *(b)* generating companies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No estimates of the effect of the advertising campaigns on first-time share buyers have been made. The purpose of the advertising campaigns has been to inform members of the general public about the flotations, whether or not they have bought shares before.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Letters)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to ensure that all prisoners writing to their hon. Members from any of Her Majesty's prison establishments give their home address in the letter in order that any hon. Member receiving the letter is immediately able to confirm that the writer is in fact a constituent.

Mrs. Rumbold: Prison standing order 5D3, a copy of which is in the Library, states that prisoners should be advised that letters to hon. Members should show the home address, if the prisoner has one. This is now covered in the information booklets for prisoners. It is not generally practicable, however, to ensure that prisoners comply with the recommended procedure as the routine reading of prisoners' mail has been abolished for category D prisoners and reduced to a small sample for category C prisoners.

Entry Refusals

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used to decide what figures are kept for those from *(a)* India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and *(b)* non-EC Europe and North America who are refused entry into the United Kingdom under primary purpose rules.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The collection of data on persons outside the Indian sub-continent applying for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom was terminated at the end of 1979 because it was considered that its usefulness did not justify the resources required to undertake it. Information continues to be collected on persons applying in the sub-continent because of the large number of applications there. Since 1983 this information has included the reason(s) for refusal for spouses and fiancé(e)s refused entry clearance.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what EC funds for 1991-92 have been allocated to assist *(a)* economic, *(b)* environmental, *(c)* social, *(d)* scientific, *(e)* technical and *(f)* cultural programmes in (i) Africa, (ii) Asia and (iii) Latin America.

Mrs. Chalker: The countries of Africa included in the Lomé convention have been allocated 4,685·5 million ecu (about £3,245 million) for the period 1990 to 1995. This figure is not allocated in advance as between individual years or categories of aid. The European Community's approved budget for 1991 does not distinguish between the categories of aid required. The total payments provision for 1991 for Asia is 175·9 million ecu (about £122 million), and for Latin America 111·2 million ecu (about £77 million).

Know-how Funds

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to extend the scope of the know-how fund for central and eastern European countries to include the education and training of non-governmental organisations in the monitoring of human rights and the practical experience of international law; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The main priorities of the know-how fund are to facilitate the transition to a market economy and a plural democracy. We have no immediate plans to extend the scope of the know-how fund as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

TRANSPORT

Falmouth Harbour

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will postpone the public inquiry into the proposed Falmouth Harbour Revision Order to allow fishermen's organisations time to make full representations.

Mr. McLoughlin: Not at this late stage. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations registered an objection to the proposed order on 12 November 1990 after it had been advertised, and were notified on 10 January 1991 that the inquiry would take place on 21 February 1991.

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of alcohol tests on drivers each week and the numbers *(a)* above twice the legal limit, *(b)* above the legal limit but below twice the limit and *(c)* below the legal limit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

Statistics of breath tests for England and Wales are published in Home Office statistical bulletins. The most recent detailed statistics, for 1989, were published in issue number 25/90. A copy of this bulletin is in the Library.

In 1989, in England and Wales, 540·9 thousand screening breath tests were reported and there were in addition 8,500 cases of persons arrested for impairment or required to provide an evidential sample for other reasons. The total requirement, 549·4 thousand, is equivalent to a weekly average of about 10,540 tests.

Of the screening tests, 427,900 were negative, leaving a total requirement for evidential tests of 121,500. The final outcome of these evidential tests is given in table 9 of the statistical bulletin 25/90. The number of positive tests was 94,900 which is equivalent to a weekly average of about 1,820 tests. The remainder includes not only negative results but also cases where the test was refused or where a sample could not be obtained. For 37,700 of the positive tests, the outcome was more than twice the legal limit, which is equivalent to about 720 tests a week.

ENVIRONMENT

Thesis Computer System

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the total costs of the Property Services Agency Thesis computer system.

Mr. Yeo: The net cost of the PSA Thesis computer system was £8·6 million.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate how many non-domestic properties in England had rate increases of *(a)* 10 per cent. and above and *(b)* 20 per cent. and above in each year from 1986-87 to 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: Estimates of the number of non-domestic properties in England subject to increases in rate bills of 10 per cent. and over and 20 per cent. and over are shown in the table.

Non-domestic properties with rate increases

Thousands

	10 per cent. and over	*20 per cent. and over*
1986-87	2,700	660
1987-88	520	70
1988-89	1,430	20
1989-90	1,100	70
1990-91	1,000	890
1991-92	1,200	720

Due to a change in the definition of non-domestic properties, following the introduction of the new system of local government finance, estimates for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are not comparable with earlier years.

The estimates for 1986-87 to 1989-90 take no account of increases in rate bills as a result of changes in rateable values following alterations of the valuation list in those years.

1851 Exhibition

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the holder of his office last attended a meeting of the royal commissioners for the exhibition of 1851.

Mr. Heseltine: No Secretary of State for the Environment has attended a meeting of the royal commissioners. The then Minister for Public Buildings and Works attended a meeting on 12 December 1962.

Leisure Centres

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing, for each local authority, the impact on the rates and community charge of the net running costs of leisure centres as a percentage of the relevant sum for the years 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Portillo: The total of net current expenditure, debt charges and expenditure on other non-current items (such as flood defence payments to the National Rivers Authority) represents spending to be funded by revenue support grant, community charges, non-domestic rates, specific grants, interest receipts and appropriation from financial reserves in 1990-91; and by block grant, rates, specific grants, interest receipts and appropriation from financial reserves in 1989-90. Authorities are free to decide, within these constraints, how spending on individual services will be allocated. The impact on the rates and community charge of spending on leisure centres cannot therefore be quantified.

The impact on net current expenditure of spending on swimming pools, sports and recreation grounds can however be shown by expressing it as a percentage of net current expenditure. I have arranged for the available information for individual authorities to be laid in the Library of the House.

Radioactive Waste Conference

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he or officials of his Department received an invitation to attend the conference on radioactive waste issues for local authorities, on 12 February.

Mr. Baldry: No.

Sellafield

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to visit Sellafield; and for what purpose.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend plans to visit Sellafield on 26 February to open the Windscale vitrification plant.

"Greening the Planet"

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to arrange a subscription for his departmental library for the new magazine "Greening the Planet".

Mr. Baldry: No. The contents of the first issue add nothing new to discussion on environmental matters.

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the housing investment programme allocation for Kirklees metropolitan council is for 1991-92; and what it was for each of the preceding five years.

Mr. Yeo: The total housing investment programme allocation for Kirklees metropolitan council for 1991-92 is currently £10·690 million. This may increase if Kirklees is successful in attracting further targeted allocations from the estate action programme or from other targeted sources. The council has been invited to work up one estate action scheme which could attract an allocation of £0·300 million in 1991-92 and a continuation allocation of £0·860 million in 1992-93. The equivalent amounts, including all estate action and other supplementary allocations, for the financial years 1986-87 to 1990-91 were:

	£ million
1986-87	8·478
1987-88	9·067
1988-89	9·041
1989-90	9·323
1990-91	12·410

East Newcastle Quayside Development

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what loan facilities or other financial assistance he has approved to enable the Newcastle urban development corporation to finance the public sector contribution to the east Newcastle quayside development.

Mr. Portillo: To date Tyne and Wear Development Corporation has been given approval for expenditure totalling £12·6 million in connection with the redevelopment of the east Quayside area of which it has so far spent about £5 million. In addition, land is being acquired through vesting orders approved by Parliament, on which it has spent £473,000. The Department is currently considering the full project submission.

Bristol Channel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether an assessment has been made on the effects on the ecology of the Bristol channel resulting from the dropping of unused bombs from B52 bombers off the north Devon coast.

Mr. Baldry: No formal assessment has been made of the environmental effect of the aircraft emergency procedure for the jettisoning of unused B52 bombs in the military danger area of Hartland point. Such bombs would have been made safe before being jettisoned, and would be unlikely to have any significant environmental effect.

Land Registers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *932*, if he will include in his review of ways of improving land registers, the various categories which exclude land from the register with a view to including them.

Mr. Yeo: I can confirm that our review covers how far the present exclusions might sensibly be reduced. Any detailed proposals would take account of the responses on this point to last year's consultation paper, and would be the subject of further consultation.

Vacant Land

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the amount of vacant, derelict, dormant, underused and under-utilised land excluded from the register because of exceptions from the rule.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 14 February 1991]:* There is no basis for making any such estimate. Whether a site falls within any of the exemptions will depend on circumstances peculiar to that site—for example, the timing of acquisition, planning decisions taken, or the site's physical characteristics.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 largest local authority owners of vacant, dormant, derelict, underused and under-utilised land on the register.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 14 February 1991]:* Information on local authority holdings of unused and underused land is held on individual authorities' registers. Complete up-to-date information is not available centrally. Information on total local authority holdings of derelict land in each area is contained in the "Survey of Derelict Land in England 1988" but the total holdings of individual authorities are not identified.

Severe Weather

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a one-off payment to local authorities for extra expenditure for the clearance of roads and for the provision of heating for the elderly and accommodation for the homeless during the present cold spell.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 14 February 1991]:* At present, we have no intention to do so. Local authorities' standard spending assessments include an allowance for the costs of clearing snow and gritting roads, and we would expect authorities to budget for snow clearance. However, if any authority can demonstrate an unusual financial burden in relation to snow clearance or other costs incurred as a result of the cold spell, they should let my Department have the details so that we may consider whether special financial assistance is justified.

The Government are meeting the costs of local authorities and voluntary bodies in relation to emergency shelters for 700 rough sleepers in London.

Finally, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in the House on 12 February, the waiver of the 0 deg C temperature to qualify for a social fund cold weather payment has been extended for a further week in respect of the seven days ending on 14 February.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dundonald Ice Bowl

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern ireland what arrears in the values of rates are estimated as due for each of the past five years for Dundonald international ice bowl.

Mr. Needham: Rates for the years 1986-87 and 1987-88 have been paid in full. The total arrears due are £167,233·46 made up of £5,911·64 for 1988-89, £77,900·04 for 1989-90 and £83,421·78 for 1990-91.

Housing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many homes the Northern Ireland Housing Executive own at Windmills Gardens, Millisle, County Down; when these homes were built; how many of these homes are occupied by persons of pensionable age; how many of these homes have full or partial heating; and what proposals there are for the provision of central heating in these homes.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I have been advised by the chief executive that the Housing Executive owns nine dwellings at Windmill gardens, Millisle, County Down. These dwellings were built in 1965 and two are occupied by persons of pensionable age. Full central heating has been installed in two dwellings and all nine dwellings will be included in a comprehensive improvement scheme scheduled for early 1993 which will include the provision of full central heating.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* all chemical weapons precursors which are subject to United Kingdom export controls.

Mr. Sainsbury: Chemical weapons precursors subject to control are listed in the Export of Goods (Control) (Amendment No. 6) Order 1990 made on 20 December. A copy is available in the Library.

The export of any chemical is subject to control if the exporter knows or has grounds for suspecting that it is intended for, or likely to be used in, the production of chemical weapons.

Export Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what orders he has made since 1979 in regard to Syria, Egypt, Israel, Libya, Iraq and Iran, in terms of a statutory instrument prohibiting the export of goods under the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* Export of Goods (Control) Orders were made in 1981, 1985, 1987 and 1989 under the powers of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939, each order replacing the previous order. These orders were subject to amendment orders to add or delete goods from export control. The Export of Goods (Control) (Iraq and Kuwait Sanctions) Order 1990 (S.I. 1640) was also made under the powers of the Act. These orders prohibit the export of specified goods without a licence to all or certain destinations, including Syria, Egypt, Israel, Libya, Iraq and Iran, as appropriate.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the goods permitted for export under the open general export licence (chemicals) of 21 December 1990.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* These goods are listed in the open general export licence (chemicals) which came into force on 31 December 1990. I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will ensure that civil servants currently employed in the ECGD have freedom of choice as to whether they remain in the civil service or transfer to the proposed privatised company.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State on 18 December 1989 at cols *23-24:*

"ECGD staff will be asked whether they wish to remain within the Civil Service, or to transfer to the new company. ECGD will use its best endeavours to meet their wishes where these are consistent with the business needs of ECGD and the company."

This remains the Government's intention.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what training and development opportunities he will make available to civil servants currently employed within the ECGD who decide that their future choice is to continue in the civil service rather than moving into a privatised company.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* All staff who remain within ECGD will continue to benefit from that Department's training and career development facilities, including appropriate training if any change of job is involved. Other civil service departments would provide similar facilities for anyone who might transfer from ECGD.

Companies Act 1989

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many statutory instruments and codes of practice are provided for in the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 13 February 1991]:* The Companies Act 1989 contains 46 powers exercisable by statutory instrument, and one provision recognising compliance with a code of practice as conduct expected of persons authorised to carry on investment business.

PRIME MINISTER

Coastal Zone

Ms. Walley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all Government Departments and non-departmental public bodies with an interest in the coastal zone.

The Prime Minister: All Government Departments may have an interest in the coast or coastal waters in the exercise of their normal duties. The same will apply to many non-departmental public bodies.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Prime Minister which Department will be responsible for funding the new Social Services Department secure units required under the proposals to abolish prison remand of juveniles.

The Prime Minister: The Department of Health already has powers to make grants to local authorities to meet the capital cost of new secure units, and intends to meet the local authority associations to discuss the nature and extent of any further secure provision required for remanded juveniles.

HEALTH

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the rundown and closure of hospitals for the mentally ill does not proceed faster than the establishment of adequate resettlement and community care for the discharged patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: In a recent circular HC(90)23/ HASSL(90)11, a copy of which is in the Library, health authorities were asked to ensure that any reduction in the number of hospital beds does not outpace the development of alternative community services. The White Paper "Caring for People", states that we

"will not approve the closure of any mental hospital unless it can be demonstrated that adequate alternatives have been developed".

Private Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions are made by his Department to recompense local authorities social services departments for the cost implications of taking over the running of private care homes which are de-registered.

Mr. Dorrell: No separate central provision for such contingencies is made. The very few instances of local authorities assuming temporary responsibility for the management of private care homes seem to have occurred where deregulation has been ordered by a justice of the peace. Local authority returns show that only seven such orders were made in 1989.

Residential Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his response to the recent Care and Counsel report on privacy in private and voluntary residential homes, a copy of which he has been sent.

Mr. Dorrell: Our community care proposals stress that frail and vulnerable people are entitled to a good quality of residential care and nursing home care. This includes the right to privacy and dignity. We aim to help ensure that this is achieved by the introduction in six weeks' time of inspection units which will monitor standards in both public and independent sector residential care homes, by the introduction of a new complaints system, and by the provision of a 25 per cent. increase in the training support grant for 1991-92. Community care purchaser contracts will further reinforce the requirement that good quality services are provided.

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the standard spending assessment for social services for Kirklees metropolitan council for 1991-92; and what it was for 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows:

	£ million
1990-91	28·1
1991-92	34·2

Neonatal Care

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each region and for England as a whole the number of *(a)* special and intensive care cots, *(b)* special and/or intensive care cots closed during 1990-91 for financial reasons, *(c)* vacancies for fully-trained neonatal nurses, *(d)* training places for neonatal nurses available in each year from 1987 and *(e)* training places for neonatal nurses filled in each year from 1987.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested at parts *(b)* to *(e)* is not collected centrally. The latest information on the daily average numbers of neonatal cots which are not in a maternity unit is set out in the table. It should be noted, however, that some health authorities also provide intensive care facilities within maternity units.

Special and neonatal intensive care cots by regional health authority England, 1988-89 to 1989-90

	1988-89	[1] *1989-90*
Regional health authority.		
Northern	260	262
Yorkshire	282	280
Trent	310	302
East Anglian	135	132
North West Thames	269	249
North East Thames	291	291
South East Thames	282	278
South West Thames	188	189
Wessex	182	183
Oxford	193	183
South Western	166	168
West Midlands	402	387
Mersey	175	172
North Western	332	334
Special health authority		
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's	46	41
ENGLAND	3,513	3,451

[1] Provisional.
Source: KH03 return (neonate cots not on maternity units).

NHS Negligence

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will outline his plans for introducing an arbitration procedure for cases in which negligence must be proven; and if he will make a statement further to his remarks during the debate on second reading of the Health Service (Compensation) Bill.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 1 February I announced that I would be prepared to undertake consultations on whether an arbitration procedure could be established within the national health service which may provide quicker, cheaper and simpler avenues for the informal resolution of disputes. I shall bring forward proposals in due course.

Salmonella

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will circulate a copy of his reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *162*, on anti-salmonella guidelines to all national health service district managers.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Correspondence

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time his Department takes to answer letters from hon. and right hon. Members.

Mr. Dorrell: Twenty-nine days for the 7,600 letters dealt with in the last six months.

Cyclosporin and AZT

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums of money have been provided by his Department towards funding Cyclosporin and AZT.

Mr. Dorrell: The costs of providing Cyclosporin and AZT within the health service are not available centrally. It is for health authorities to identify needs for the drugs and make suitable provision.

Funds for treating AIDS patients are allocated to regions on the basis of the number of live AIDS cases within the region and the cost of AZT is met from those allocations. Unlike transplants, the treatment of AIDS has been concentrated in certain regions.

Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his response to the contents of the recent report on the causes and consequences of the community care delays, published jointly by the King's Fund Institute, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Nuffield Institute, a copy of which he has been sent.

Mr. Dorrell: I reaffirm the Governments commitment to the policy as set out in the White Paper "Caring for People". The timetable for its implementation will remain as stated to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State in July 1990. We welcome the continued enthusiasm of the authors of the report for our policy.

Pasteurised Eggs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to national health service district general managers on the use of pasteurised eggs in recipes for lightly cooked egg products.

Mr. Dorrell: Guidance given in our press release of 21 November 1988 notifies the procedures that should be adopted when producing lightly cooked eggs. This coupled with our earlier advice, in our circular letter EL(88)P/136 of 29 July 1988, on storage and on the use of raw shell eggs in recipes is still extant, a copy is available in the Library.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 February to the hon. Member for Wakefield, *Official Report*, column *96*, if health authorities are empowered to charge for the supply of incontinence pads to individual residents in private nursing homes.

Mr. Dorrell: While Departmental guidance to health authorities is that they should not supply incontinence pads to private nursing home residents, there is nothing in law to prevent it. If health authorities were to supply them, they would not be allowed to charge.

Transplants

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently awaiting a kidney transplant, a heart transplant, a heart and lung transplant, a lung transplant, a liver transplant and any other form of transplant; and what is the present supply situation for each of these categories.

Mr. Dorrell: According to information provided by the United Kingdom transplant service the number of patients awaiting transplants as at 11 February 1991 were:

	Number
Kidney	3,678
Pancreas	5
Kidney and pancreas	16
Heart	241
Lung	67
Heart and lung	225
Liver	69
Cornea	579

The number of organs retrieved for transplant were:

	1989	*1990 (provisional)*	*Percentage change*
Kidney	1,923	1,932	<1
Heart	281	305	+ 9
Heart and lung	86	95	+10
Lung	31	51	+65
Liver	345	406	+17
Cornea	2,729	2,966	+ 9

Kidney Patients

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will be replying to the letter from the hon. Member for Newbury of 16 January about a meeting with officers of the National Federation of Kidney Patients Associations.

Mr. Waldegrave: As my hon. Friend knows from my letter to him of 13 February, I never received his letter of 16 January.

My office will, of course, be in touch with him about a meeting.

Smoked Fish

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there are any reported cases of poisoning as a result of the consumption of smoked fish sent through the post in the last 25 years.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on 21 January at column *76*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Institute for Democracy

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those member countries of the Council of Europe which have contributed to the International Institute for Democracy since its establishment in 1988, stating the total amount pledged to the most recent date.

Mr. Garel-Jones: As at 12 February 1991 the following Council of Europe member states had contributed to the International Institute for Democracy:

Belgium
Cyprus
Denmark
Finland
France
Iceland
Italy
Liechtenstein
Malta
Netherlands
Norway
Portugal
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey

The total pledged to date amounts to FF563,072·64, including contributions from Australia and the Centre for Democracy, Washington.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government propose to contribute to the work of the International Institute for Democracy established by the Council of Europe in 1988; and what size of contribution he has in mind.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have no plans to contribute to the work of this institute.

Illegal Arms and Ammunition

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provisions control the circumstances in which entry to a foreign mission in the United Kingdom can be authorised in order to check for the presence of illegal arms or ammunition.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Article 22 of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations provides that the premises of the mission shall be inviolable, and that the agents of the receiving state may not enter them except with consent of the head of mission.

The same article provides that the receiving state is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage.

Foreign Diplomats

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the limitations on the powers of the police to apprehend and search for arms and ammunition foreign diplomats leaving their foreign mission in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Article 29 of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations provides that the person of a diplomatic agent shall be inviolable and that he shall not be liable to any form of arrest or detention. Article 41 of the convention provides that it is the duty of all persons enjoying such privileges and immunities to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving state.

We have made clear to all missions in London that it is the duty of the police to prevent the unauthorised carriage of firearms, and that persons suspected of carrying firearms are likely to be questioned.

Diplomatic Relations

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is the practice when diplomatic relations have been terminated with a foreign country for Her Majesty's Government to accept the nomination of any other foreign country with a recognised mission in the United Kingdom as protector of the interests of the first country; and what freedom to decline to accept such arrangements is available to Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In accordance with articles 45 and 46 of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations, when diplomatic relations have been broken off with a foreign country, Her Majesty's Government as the receiving state, will consider the nomination by the sending state, of a third state to assume the role of a protecting power. It is for Her Majesty's Government alone to decide whether or not the nomination is acceptable.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the United Kingdom presented its statement to the plenary session of the recent amendment conference of states who are parties to the treaty banning nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and underwater; who led the United Kingdom delegation; what response was made to the United Kingdom statement by other participating delegations; to whom the statement has been circulated; what was the total cost of United Kingdom participation in the conference; what meetings were held with non-governmental organisations in attendance as observers; and what representations from non-governmental organisations were received by the United Kingdom delegation to the conference.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom statement to the plenary session was delivered on 11 January; the United Kingdom delegation was led by the deputy head of the United Kingdom delegation to the conference on disarmament at Geneva; the statement was the last to be delivered to the plenary session and produced no subsequent response in the committee of the whole; it was circulated to participating delegations, non-governmental organisations and the press; the total cost of United Kingdom participation was approximately £20,000; an informal session of the conference was allocated for NGOs to state their views; the United Kingdom delegation received several representations from NGOs and held informal meetings with as many as possible.

Hadj

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with the appropriate Saudi Arabian authorities concerning arrangements for British Muslims wishing to visit holy places during Hadj; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The question of pass quotas for pilgrims is a matter for the Saudi Ministry of the Hadj, who assess quotas on a country-by country basis. We have asked the British embassy in Riyadh to contact the Ministry to find out what plans have been made for this year's pilgrimage. I will tell the hon. Member of the outcome.

Myanmar

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to prevent the supply of Rolls-Royce engines, via Yugoslavia, to the security forces in Myanmar.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made representations to the Yugoslav authorities about the re-export of this equipment to Burma.

Hong Kong

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Hong Kong on the need to ensure that the existing de facto abolition of the death penalty in Hong Kong is confirmed in legislation for the territory before 1997.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are no plans to change the present situation.

The Gulf (RSPCA)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance was offered by his Department to the RSPCA team visiting the Gulf to assist in the cleaning of oil-damaged seabirds and mammals.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are pleased to say that this Department was able to pay the return air fares of the RSPCA experts vising Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Gulf affected by this monstrous act of environmental terrorism. In consultation with the Saudi authorities through the British embassy in Riyadh, this Department also assisted with a number of administrative arrangements prior to the team's departure.

Nuclear Material

Mr. Bob Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the statement of October 1990 about a black market operating in nuclear materials outside of safeguards controls, if he will make it his policy to seek further information from the chairman of Argentina's Comision Nacional de Energia Atomica.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* Since 1985, it has been the declared policy of the Government of Argentina to insist that IAEA safeguards are applied to all nuclear material and equipment exported from Argentina.

SCOTLAND

Fishing

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the effect of the recently introduced restrictions in catching opportunities imposed on the Scottish inshore fleet by the recent EC tie-up scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Monitoring of the uptake of the United Kingdom quotas is carried out by Fisheries Departments as a matter of course throughout the year. We will continue to monitor the effects of the requirement for vessels to remain in port for eight consecutive days per month. In addition, discussions have now been concluded successfully with the European Commission to enable fishermen to use more selective fishing gear as an alternative to remaining in port.

Homelessness

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the special measures taken by Her Majesty's Government to protect homeless people in Scotland from the recent bad weather conditions; and if he will make it his policy to collect urgently and centrally information about the number of people sleeping rough.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities, with their statutory responsibilities for helping the homeless and for dealing with emergencies, are best placed to determine the measures needed in their areas and to take appropriate action. Local authority housing and social work departments have not given us evidence to indicate that sleeping rough is a significant problem in their areas; while precise figures on the number of people sleeping rough are not available, advice from local authorities and voluntary bodies is that the number in Scotland at any one time is very small. Arrangements are being made to enumerate those sleeping rough on census night, 21 April 1991.

Housing

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the level of housing support grant paid by his Department to each local authority in Scotland in *(a)* cash terms, and *(b)* real terms at 1991-92 prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The housing support grant entitlements of individual local authorities, in cash terms and at 1991-92 prices, are shown in the following tables.

Housing Support Grant (in cash terms)
1979-80 to 1984-85

£

Area	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Scotland	213,400,000	228,200,000	161,900,000	104,632,870	72,135,479	67,211,241
Berwickshire	1,304,502	1,306,875	1,038,356	686,226	648,884	486,805
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,725,856	1,753,749	1,154,679	552,583	373,420	107,262
Roxburgh	1,734,338	1,971,598	1,537,295	1,165,695	1,260,321	1,265,786
Tweeddale	289,209	285,768	109,055	0	0	0
Clackmannan	1,850,234	1,818,745	1,283,981	689,627	45,021	0
Falkirk	7,957,349	7,479,143	4,428,554	1,494,309	0	0
Stirling	1,929,781	1,916,151	1,016,562	1,335,195	20,431	0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,094,232	1,452,108	1,272,965	1,387,048	1,574,069	1,673,013
Nithsdale	1,147,826	905,200	100	0	0	0
Stewartry	548,774	676,321	542,539	412,797	414,643	359,095
Wigtown	1,046,584	1,154,830	767,726	452,325	255,317	200,315
Dunfermline	5,391,353	6,079,270	2,800,067	683,115	0	0
Kirkcaldy	6,303,279	6,500,216	3,077,166	696,260	0	0
North East Fife	1,586,114	1,664,141	979,538	829,197	309,583	87,427
Aberdeen	9,749,391	10,733,105	9,533,966	7,089,761	3,724,702	3,053,523
Banff and Buchan	4,966,010	5,495,862	4,343,622	3,306,069	2,437,206	1,943,394
Gordon	2,857,278	2,860,784	2,379,107	2, 240,622	1,709,877	1,940,317
Kincardine and Deeside	1,304,661	1,373,533	933,388	817,907	972,194	854,052
Moray	4,237,483	4,402,062	3,552,254	2,301,798	1,987,151	1,790,081
Badenoch and Strathspey	413,089	470,225	435,542	505,386	515,570	487,297
Caithness	1,231,796	1,044,456	876,132	817,378	819,544	826,248
Inverness	2,461,414	2,323,484	1,631,231	1,375,208	1,241,308	1,305,145
Lochaber	1,860,212	1,825,267	1,813,360	1,383,564	1,334,449	1,225,916
Nairn	320,089	351,660	251,993	206,063	265,393	227,117
Ross and Cromarty	3,889,456	4,249,933	4,199,542	3,493,364	3,091,946	3,241,650
Skye and Lochalsh	342,729	343,792	316,747	316,309	323,325	394,993
Sutherland	674,923	729,163	519,316	477,942	446,107	467,987
East Lothian	4,723,964	5,062,507	3,155,554	2,079,858	1,050,527	392,369
Edinburgh	11,269,405	12,517,913	7,869,440	2,327,904	0	0
Midlothian	3,496,811	3,334,405	1,791,607	906,746	0	0
West Lothian	4,655,453	4,796,099	2,182,016	0	0	0
Argyll and Bute	3,410,909	3,565,946	2,811,692	2,767,417	2,554,514	2,308,945
Bearsden and Milngavie	464,877	458,385	193,589	0	0	0
Clydebank	3,548,652	4,032,786	3,285,203	2,201,808	1,855,408	1,774,590
Clydesdale	1,842,814	1,651,898	578,477	0	0	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	677,835	670,398	117,762	0	0	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	1,982,826	1,812,670	819,727	167,191	0	0
Cunninghame	4,800,670	4,656,897	2,744,500	745,237	0	0
Dumbarton	2,997,918	2,805,151	1,177,708	0	0	0
East Kilbride	327,324	340,284	98,060	0	0	0
Eastwood	282,503	303,824	15,462	0	0	0
Glasgow	41,496,149	49,487,984	44,099,691	37,292,928	32,355,851	32,269,404
Hamilton	4,960,259	5,015,434	3,243,635	1,543,988	119,816	0
Inverclyde	5,602,776	6,140,965	4,443,201	3,048,261	1,865,250	1,162,804
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	3,584,819	4,168,590	1,885,952	298,335	0	0
Kyle and Carrick	4,422,325	4,351,786	2,807,798	911,439	447,952	0
Monklands	4,601,208	4,359,605	4,252,050	3,222,528	1,705,278	1,956,032
Motherwell	7,919,644	8,193,225	5,737,727	3,296,551	1,037,418	0
Renfrew	6,486,220	6,571,032	2,186,158	0	0	0
Strathkelvin	1,956,176	2,401,186	1,539,073	1,198,935	326,922	2,775
Angus	4,236,548	4,372,617	2,499,757	1,221,795	181,321	0
Dundee	7,740,698	8,602,017	5,285,879	1,820,168	0	0
Perth and Kinross	3,502,848	3,118,176	1,309,294	0	0	0
Orkney	1,074,091	1,103,278	1,082,222	852,422	731,864	779,233
Shetland	2,099,598	1,889,843	2,624,591	2,654,652	2,409,052	2,764,219
Western Isles	1,016,718	1,247,658	1,267,392	1,358,959	1,723,845	1,863,547

1985-86 to 1991-92

£

Area	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Scotland	64,178,219	44,469,760	41,917,523	54,631,469	65,296,686	57,963,694	55,435,945
Berwickshire	446,429	201,135	225,306	91,417	48,841	0	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roxburgh	1,306,156	951,730	1,115,301	1,124,908	1,339,141	1,321,472	1,139,087
Tweeddale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clackmannan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falkirk	0	0	0	0	0	0	91,878
Stirling	0	0	0	0	0	0	132,696
Annandale and Eskdale	1,759,500	1,382,490	1,337,917	1,557,353	1,684,048	1,504,110	1,288,127
Nithsdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Area	1985-86 £	1986-87 £	1987-88 £	1988-89 £	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £
Stewartry	343,400	253,704	386,158	413,062	509,240	436,944	175,842
Wigtown	95,565	0	265,382	410,486	551,246	600,795	455,431
Dunfermline	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kirkcaldy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East Fife	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aberdeen	2,260,303	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banff and Buchan	1,599,685	558,241	617,681	246,862	136,883	0	0
Gordon	1,800,235	1,838,802	2,723,337	3,276,799	3,788,264	3,792,482	3,808,288
Kincardine and Deeside	942,305	779,199	1,267,315	1,617,844	1,922,521	1,882,382	1,828,221
Moray	1,509,258	682,537	982,346	614,211	528,935	0	0
Badenoch and Strathspey	497,879	388,218	462,702	384,299	393,499	386,736	330,314
Caithness	750,997	663,077	759,297	1,012,850	1,229,421	1,330,831	1,249,076
Inverness	1,510,450	1,033,853	1,157,218	1,370,584	1,949,824	1,934,977	1,657,779
Lochaber	1,398,166	1,441,327	1,396,801	1,800,599	2,148,759	2,398,530	2,463,394
Nairn	218,689	181,633	209,500	274,618	344,628	350,804	306,917
Ross and Cromarty	3,474,516	3,178,298	3,339,315	3,793,708	4,154,244	4,231,891	4,159,560
Skye and Lochalsh	467,318	586,754	789,606	985,932	1,203,495	1,303,836	1,343,234
Sutherland	518,431	522,874	643,801	796,808	969,864	1,006,044	992,735
East Lothian	23,235	0	0	0	0	0	0
Edinburgh	0	0	0	0	0	0	526,144
Midlothian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Lothian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Argyll and Bute	2,155,278	1,373,972	1,709,251	1,586,284	1,775,900	1,041,664	618,210
Bearsden and Milngavie	0	0	51,224	124,971	278,995	317,125	301,748
Clydebank	1,778,773	804,237	786,456	1,031,201	1,010,546	650,646	438,557
Clydesdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cunninghame	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,774
Dumbarton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Kilbride	0	0	63,514	33,496	0	0	61,626
Eastwood	0	0	0	0	0	0	8,108
Glasgow	32,675,646	21,891,239	15,116,893	24,660,513	30,697,621	24,536,123	22,687,417
Hamilton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inverclyde	562,537	0	0	0	0	0	153,317
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,382
Kyle and Carrick	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Monklands	328,169	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motherwell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Renfrew	0	0	0	0	0	0	28,488
Strathkelvin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Angus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dundee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Perth and Kinross	0	0	0	0	0	0	29,303
Orkney	804,942	684,343	743,450	850,377	776,917	783,399	639,138
Shetland	2,778,672	2,934,933	3,172,405	3,677,667	4,112,702	4,395,805	4,603,666
Western Isles	2,171,685	2,137,164	2,595,347	2,894,620	3,741,152	3,757,098	3,907,490

Housing Support Grant
(at 1991-92 prices)

1978-80 to 1984-85

£

Area	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Scotland	489,898,990	442,711,365	286,432,072	172,838,333	113,889,733	100,986,013
Berwickshire	2,994,725	2,535,357	1,837,050	1,133,546	1,024,478	731,433
Ettrick and Lauderdale	3,962,020	3,402,299	2,042,848	912,787	589,567	161,163
Roxburgh	3,981,492	3,824,929	2,719,769	1,925,559	1,989,834	1,901,865
Tweeddale	663,933	554,394	192,939	0	0	0
Clackmannan	4,247,553	3,528,392	2,271,608	1,139,164	71,081	0
Falkirk	18,267,560	14,509,648	7,834,959	2,468,382	0	0
Stirling	4,430,168	3,717,361	1,798,493	2,205,549	32,257	0
Annandale and Eskdale	2,512,011	2,817,111	2,252,119	2,291,202	2,485,189	2,513,730
Nithsdale	2,635,046	1,756,101	177	0	0	0
Stewartry	1,259,812	1,312,073	959,855	681,881	654,651	539,546
Wigtown	2,402,626	2,240,387	1,358,254	747,175	403,102	300,977
Dunfermline	12,376,843	11,793,873	4,953,854	1,128,407	0	0
Kirkcaldy	14,470,337	12,610,515	5,444,095	1,150,121	0	0
North East Fife	3,641,217	3,228,458	1,732,990	1,369,713	488,779	131,361
Aberdeen	22,381,522	20,822,382	16,867,410	11,711,257	5,880,675	4,587,969
Banff and Buchan	11,400,390	10,662,053	7,684,698	5,461,147	3,847,936	2,919,982
Gordon	6,559,408	5,549,963	4,209,095	3,701,183	2,669,607	2,915,359
Kincardine and Deeside	2,995,090	2,664,674	1,651,342	1,351,064	1,534,930	1,283,227

Area	1979-80 £	1980-81 £	1981-82 £	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-84 £
Moray	9,727,922	8,540,065	6,284,617	3,802,237	3,137,376	2,689,627
Badenoch and Strathspey	948,322	912,243	770,557	834,824	813,998	732,172
Caithness	2,827,815	2,026,260	1,550,045	1,350,190	1,293,922	1,241,451
Inverness	5,650,629	4,507,593	2,885,960	2,271,644	1,959,816	1,961,002
Lochaber	4,270,459	3,541,045	3,208,181	2,285,447	2,106,869	1,841,809
Nairn	734,823	682,226	445,824	340,386	419,011	341,247
Ross and Cromarty	8,928,962	8,244,933	7,429,793	5,770,531	4,881,660	4,870,633
Skye and Lochalsh	786,798	666,962	560,386	522,497	510,476	593,484
Sutherland	1,549,410	1,414,587	918,769	789,491	704,328	703,158
East Lothian	10,844,729	9,821,338	5,582,779	3,435,624	1,658,605	589,541
Edinburgh	25,870,994	24,284,936	13,922,545	3,845,360	0	0
Midlothian	8,027,573	6,468,795	3,169,696	1,497,813	0	0
West Lothian	10,687,449	9,304,503	3,860,404	0	0	0
Argyll and Bute	7,830,370	6,917,988	4,974,421	4,571,372	4,033,146	3,469,228
Bearsden and Milngavie	1,067,211	889,274	342,496	0	0	0
Clydebank	8,146,584	7,823,664	5,812,153	3,637,068	2,929,376	2,666,351
Clydesdale	4,230,519	3,204,706	1,023,436	0	0	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1,556,095	1,300,582	208,344	0	0	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	4,551,942	3,516,607	1,450,254	276,175	0	0
Cunninghame	11,020,822	9,034,449	4,855,546	1,231,023	0	0
Dumbarton	6,882,273	5,442,034	2,083,591	0	0	0
East Kilbride	751,433	660,156	173,487	0	0	0
Eastwood	648,538	589,423	27,355	0	0	0
Glasgow	95,262,050	96,007,419	78,020,790	61,602,511	51,084,422	48,485,319
Hamilton	11,387,188	9,730,016	5,738,611	2,550,444	189,169	0
Inverclyde	12,862,204	11,913,563	7,860,873	5,035,285	2,944,915	1,747,132
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	8,229,612	8,087,126	3,336,610	492,806	0	0
Kyle and Carrick	10,152,261	8,442,529	4,967,532	1,505,565	707,241	0
Monklands	10,562,920	8,457,698	7,522,690	5,323,149	2,692,346	2,938,971
Motherwell	18,181,001	15,894,977	10,151,137	5,445,424	1,637,908	0
Renfrew	14,890,312	12,747,899	3,867,732	0	0	0
Strathkelvin	4,490,762	4,658,336	2,722,915	1,980,467	516,155	4,169
Angus	9,725,776	8,482,941	4,422,548	2,018,228	286,275	0
Dundee	17,770,197	16,688,040	9,351,731	3,006,654	0	0
Perth and Kinross	8,041,433	6,049,307	2,316,392	0	0	0
Orkney	2,465,774	2,140,376	1,914,658	1,408,078	1,155,490	1,170,811
Shetland	4,820,014	3,666,323	4,643,404	4,385,100	3,803,486	4,153,285
Western Isles	2,334,063	2,420,475	2,242,259	2,244,803	2,721,660	2,800,011

1985-86 to 1991-92

£

Area	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Scotland	91,449,m321	61,271,680	54,771,953	66,528,817	74,751,220	61,441,270	55,435,945
Berwickshire	636,129	277,129	294,398	111,325	55,913	0	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roxburgh	1,861,178	1,311,320	1,457,319	1,369,884	1,533,040	1,400,755	1,139,087
Tweeddale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clackmannan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falkirk	0	0	0	0	0	0	91,878
Stirling	0	0	0	0	0	0	132,696
Annandale and Eskdale	2,507,160	1,904,833	1,748,203	1,896,505	1,927,887	1,594,350	1,288,127
Nithsdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stewartry	489,320	349,560	504,577	503,016	582,975	463,159	175,842
Wigtown	136,173	0	346,764	499,879	631,063	636,840	455,431
Dunfermline	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kirkcaldy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East Fife	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aberdeen	3,220,768	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banff and Buchan	2,279,435	769,160	807,099	300,622	156,703	0	0
Gordon	2,565,205	2,533,553	3,558,476	3,990,403	4,336,780	4,020,015	3,808,288
Kincardine and Deeside	1,342,716	1,073,602	1,655,950	1,970,169	2,200,890	1,995,317	1,828,221
Moray	2,150,584	940,419	1,283,592	747,971	605,521	0	0
Badenoch and Strathspey	709,442	534,898	604,594	467,990	450,475	409,939	330,314
Caithness	1,070,116	913,606	992,143	1,233,423	1,407,433	1,410,675	1,249,076
Inverness	2,152,282	1,424,472	1,512,091	1,669,062	2,232,146	2,051,067	1,657,779
Lochaber	1,992,285	1,985,901	1,825,144	2,192,724	2,459,885	2,542,432	2,463,394
Nairn	311,616	250,259	273,745	334,423	394,528	371,851	306,917
Ross and Cromarty	4,950,934	4,379,148	4,363,349	4,619,881	4,755,751	4,485,787	4,159,560
Skye and Lochalsh	665,894	808,446	1,031,747	1,200,643	1,377,753	1,382,061	1,343,234
Sutherland	738,727	720,430	841,229	970,333	1,110,294	1,066,402	992,735
East Lothian	33,108	0	0	0	0	0	0
Edinburgh	0	0	0	0	0	0	526,144
Midlothian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Lothian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Area	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Argyll and Bute	3,071,115	1,893,097	2,233,410	1,931,736	2,033,039	1,104,159	618,210
Bearsden and Milngavie	0	0	66,932	152,187	319,392	336,151	301,748
Clydebank	2,534,623	1,108,100	1,027,631	1,255,770	1,156,866	689,682	438,557
Clydesdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cunninghame	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,774
Dumbarton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Kilbride	0	0	82,991	40,791	0	0	61,626
Eastwood	0	0	0	0	0	0	8,108
Glasgow	46,560,433	30,162,362	19,752,640	30,030,947	35,142,436	26,008,186	22,687,417
Hamilton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inverclyde	801,575	0	0	0	0	0	153,317
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,382
Kyle and Carrick	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Monklands	467,617	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motherwell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Renfrew	0	0	0	0	0	0	28,488
Strathkelvin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Angus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dundee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Perth and Kinross	0	0	0	0	0	0	29,303
Orkney	1,146,984	942,907	971,436	1,035,568	889,410	830,400	639,138
Shetland	3,959,407	4,043,833	4,145,255	4,478,570	4,708,194	4,659,535	4,603,666
Western Isles	3,094,494	2,944,644	3,391,236	3,524,995	4,282,846	3,982,508	3,907,490

DEFENCE

Research Grants

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total amount of money spent on the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme in each financial year since 1985 and how much of this was spent specifically by the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The annual expenditure by the Ministry of Defence on the Joint Research Council/MOD research grants scheme in each financial year since 1985 is as follows:

	£
1985-86	nil
1986-87	110,559
1987-88	870,654
1988-89	2,078,082
1989-90	3,256,617
1990-91	[1]5,250,000

[1] Estimate.

The amount of research council commitment is a matter for the councils themselves.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the areas of research identified as high priority under the directed mode component of the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: To date the scheme has operated in responsive mode only.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many research grants currently exist under the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme; how many universities and polytechnics currently hold these grants; and what is their total value.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are currently 426 Joint RC/MOD research grants involving 61 universities and polytechnics. The total MOD contribution to these awards amounts to £20·5 million.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many research grants have been awarded under the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme in each financial year since 1985;

(2) how many research grants have been awarded in each financial year since 1985 under the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme specifically in conjunction with *(a)* the Science and Engineering Research Council, *(b)* the Medical Research Council, *(c)* Natural Environment Research Council *(d)* Agricultural and Food Research Council and *(e)* Economic and Social Research Council.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The figures requested are as follows. No joint grant awards have been made with the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Year	SERC	NERC	ESRC	MRC	Total
1985-86	—	—	—	—	—
1986-87	65	5	—	—	70
1987-88	35	7	—	—	42
1988-89	73	6	—	3	82
1989-90	141	6	5	1	153
[1]1990-91	83	1	1	1	86

[1] To date.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money the Ministry of Defence originally planned to spend on the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme in each financial year since 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It was envisaged that MOD funding to the scheme would build up progressively to some £5 million per annum.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which of the Science and Engineering Research

Council's interdisciplinary research centres his Department has providing funding; what amount of funding has been provided; and for what purpose.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Ministry of Defence currently provides funding to one of the Science and Engineering Research Council's interdisciplinary research centres. It is not our policy to give further details of these arrangements.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the Ministry of Defence's research establishments have been involved in the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The following have been involved:

Admiralty Research Establishment
Atomic Weapons Establishment
Chemical Defence Establishment
Royal Aerospace Establishment
Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment
Royal Signals and Radar Establishment
Stores and Clothing Research and Development Establishment

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what links there have been in the last three years between the Ministry of Defence and the research councils.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Contributions are made to grants for work of relevance to defence under the Joint Research Council/Ministry of Defence research grants scheme. Also the MOD and the Science and Engineering Research Council co-fund awards to certain students who are jointly supervised by their university and the defence research establishments. MOD staff sit as members or assessors on certain research council committees and panels.

Machrihanish Air Base

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the future of the Machrihanish air base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to change the role of RAF Machrihanish for the foreseeable future. It is established to support United States Navy maritime patrol operations in war.

Low Flying

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of low-flying activity over the United Kingdom since 1 October 1990 has been carried out by foreign air forces other than those of the United States.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Between 1 October 1990 and 31 December 1991 (the most recent date for which statistics are available) flights by foreign aircraft, other than those of the United States Air Force based in this country, represented under 1 per cent. of the total number of flights in the United Kingdom low flying system.

AWE Aldermaston

Sir Michaeal McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what amounts of untreated nuclear waste are currently being stored at atomic weapons establishment Aldermaston; how soon a safe disposal site will be found for it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: MOD policy is to dispose of radioactive waste via nationally available disposal routes wherever reasonably practicable. However for certain categories of waste, MOD, like the civil nuclear industry awaits the availability of a safe national disposal site such as the deep repository being planned by UK Nirex Ltd. for operation in 2005. Until that time, MOD is following the practice adopted by most nuclear sites in the United Kingdom of storing waste for which there is no current disposal route at the site where it is produced. About 2,000 cu m of untreated radioactive waste are currently stored at the atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston, pending the availability of the deep repository. It is stored in closed containers in purpose-built facilities which are subject to regular monitoring and surveillance, and it constitutes no danger to the public, the work force or the environment. Treatment of waste is only performed when it is clear that this will result in a waste form which is likely to be acceptable for disposal.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the routine site management at atomic weapons establishment Aldermaston and particularly on safety checks; and if he will publish the manpower target for the establishment and its current staff total.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Since the implementation of the Interim Management Contract on 1 October 1990 management of the AWE Aldermaston site has been the responsibility of a new management team comprising experienced managers seconded from Hunting-BRAE and existing senior personnel who have long experience of AWE operations. This management team is tasked with ensuring the most effective overall management of AWE, concentrating initially on manufacturing work and site services, whilst complying with appropriate safeguards for health and safety and security. The routine safety checks carried out at AWE include the personal monitoring of individuals, the monitoring of their working environment and the monitoring of the public and general environment for radiation, radioactive, and other potentially dangerous substances, as appropriate. The frequency and intensity of such monitoring programmes are arranged to be capable of timely detection of exposures to hazards at levels very substantially below limits and constraints set by legislation. The monitoring data obtained confirm that such very low levels continue to be achieved.

These procedures continue to demonstrate that a safe working and public environment is maintained at AWE sites and that the sites do not constitute dangers to the workers or the public.

It is not our policy to release details of manpower figures.

Ministry Employees (Northern Ireland)

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider providing financial compensation for Ministry of Defence employees working in Northern Ireland similar to that provided for civilians carrying out work under contract at Ministry of Defence locations in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I can confirm that officials are currently considering a scheme to alleviate the stress and strain experienced by MOD employees in Northern Ireland.

B52 Bombers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that unexploded bombs discharged into the Bristol channel by returning B52s from Iraq will be positioned sufficiently far from the north Devon coastline to cause no injury or trauma to people or animals on land or at sea.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no agreed arrangements for B52 aircraft returning from Iraq to discharge unexploded bombs into the Bristol channel. However, as I indicated in the House on 13 February at columns 849-52, an established military danger area off Hartland Point seaward of the Bristol channel has been activated full time, to be used in the unlikely event that a B52 from RAF Fairford encountered an emergency shortly after take-off which required it to jettison its weapons. Appropriate notices to mariners and airmen have been issued, and every step would be taken in an emergency to ensure that there was no risk to other aircraft, shipping or people.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions the United States Air Force has given to the crews of B52 bombers on dropping unused bombs within United Kingdom territorial waters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: B52 aircrews have been instructed that, in the unlikely event of an emergency after take-off from RAF Fairford which makes it necessary to jettison their weapons, they must declare an emergency on the radio frequency in use and then proceed, under air traffic control, to the established military danger area off Hartland Point. Before jettisoning ordnance the aircrew must ensure by the use of radar and visual checks that the area is clear of shipping and other aircraft, and must fully avoid the island of Lundy.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice he has given to seafarers using the Bristol channel of the possible danger of damaged B52 bombers dropping their unused bombs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A radio navigation warning has been issued advising that the possibility of aircraft jettisoning weapons exists within an established military danger area to the west of Hartland Point and that warnings to leave the area may be issued at short notice on VHF radio. Action has been taken to ensure that this information is relayed to all seafarers who may use the area.

The Gulf

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make arrangements to enable British forces serving in the Gulf to receive religious material; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Appropriate arrangements have been made for the pastoral and spiritual care of our forces in the Gulf.

War Graves

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the work intended to be carried out under the agreement concerning the Mosul war cemetery replacement has been completed to the satisfaction of the agreement signed on 30 October 1989, as set out in Cm. 1399.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In July 1990 the Iraqi Government informed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that the work at the Mosul war cemetery had been completed, but it has not been possible for Commission staff to visit Iraq to confirm this.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply, 31 January, *Official Report*, column *592*, if he will set out *(a)* in calculating the average central cost component of annual maintenance grant for the existing grant-maintained schools, how many local education authorities were involved and *(b)* the average value expressed as a percentage of the direct spending commitment of central annual maintenance grant based on returns from local education authorities for which section 42 information is available.

Mr. Eggar: There are 50 existing grant-maintained schools situated in 34 local education authority areas. The calculation of the average central cost component of annual maintenance grant for 1990-91 was based on budget information from those 34 local education authorities. We have not calculated annual maintenance grant figures for local education authorities where there is no grant-maintained school. It would be disproportionately costly to do so.

Outdoor Education Centres

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to amend the provisions for local management of schools so as to secure the funding of outdoor education centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Under local management of schools it is for individual local education authorities to decide whether to delegate the funding of outdoor education centres to schools. Delegation need not affect the future of the centres, provided that they offer schools good educational value for money.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the role of outdoor education centres in the provisions of the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: The delivery of the national curriculum is a matter for schools to determine. It would be open to schools to make use of outdoor education centres in delivering the national curriculum, but they could not be required to do so under the terms of the Education Reform Act.

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the standard spending assessment for education for Kirklees metropolitan council for 1991-92; and what it was for 1990-91.

Mr. Fallon: The education component of the 1990-91 standard spending assessment for Kirklees metropolitan council is £128·823 million. The figure for 1991-92 is £148·129 million, an increase of 15 per cent.

Research Councils

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the financial allocations to the Research Councils for 1991-92, identifying programmes and capital programmes earmarked in advance by Government; and what were the comparable allocations in the three previous years in real terms.

Mr. Alan Howarth *[pursuant to his reply, 8 February 1991, c. 256]:* I regret that there were some errors in the figures given in the original answer.

The corrected answer is as follows:

The allocations to the five research councils for 1991-92 announced on 24 January are as follows:

	£ million
AFRC	93·4
ESRC	35·5
MRC	200·4
NERC	122·6
SERC	451·3

None of the additional amounts announced this year was allocated to particular programmes in advance. The sums so allocated to particular programmes for 1991-92 in earlier settlements were as follows; redundancy costs as a result of reductions in MAFF research commissions £6·0 million (AFRC), AIDS £8·5 million (MRC), British Antarctic Survey (BAS) £6·2 million (NERC), British Geological Survey (BGS) £7·0 million (NERC), CERN £7·3 million (SERC), ERS2 instruments £2·0 million (SERC).

For the three preceding years the total grant to each council and the sums specifically allocated in earlier settlements (at 1991-92 prices) were as follows:

£ million

Council	*Grant in Aid*	*Specific Allocations*
1990-91		
AFRC	91·8	MAFF 4·2
ESRC	38·4	—
MRC	196·8	AIDS 8·5
NERC	114·2	BAS 31·2, BGS 5·3
SERC	463·3	CERN 7·7, ERS2 2·1
1989-90		
AFRC	87·4	MAFF 3·4
ESRC	36·6	—
MRC	201·9	AIDS 9·2
NERC	131·6	BAS 10·5, BGS 3·4
SERC	463·5	CERN 10·6
1988-89		
AFRC	71·1	—
ESRC	33·7	—
MRC	178·7	AIDS 7·3
NERC	110·7	BAS 10·5
SERC	446·2	—

NATIONAL FINANCE

Fuel Prices

Mr. Michael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make it his policy to achieve a differential between diesel and petrol prices which is comparable with the differential experienced within European competitor countries.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Community Charge

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the increase in the standard rate of income tax which would be necessary to yield the same revenue as his estimate of the yield of the community charge in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Norman Lamont: For 1990-91 local authorities community charge yield (gross) is budgeted at £14 billion (GB). For 1991-92 budgeted figures are not yet available. However, if all authorities spend in line with standard spending assessments the estimated gross yield of the community charge would be £14·5 billion (GB).

On this basis, the estimated yield net of community charge benefit, transitional relief and the community charge reduction scheme is £11·4 billion in 1990-91 and £10·6 billion in 1991-92.

To yield the same net revenue the standard rate of income tax would need to be increased by around 7½p for 1990-91 and around 5½p for 1991-92.

THE ARTS

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the principal achievements of his Department since June 1987.

Mr. Renton: The Government's achievements in the Arts since 1987 have been numerous and varied. Among the most important I would list:

The growth in central Government support for arts activities. By 1991-92, planned expenditure will have increased in real terms by 16 per cent. since 1987-88.

The establishment of a three-year programme of funding for the arts, and the introduction of measures to encourage greater self-reliance among arts institutions.

Following a comprehensive review, key decisions have been announced on the reform of the structure of the funding of the arts. The new system, which will start to be introduced over the next year, will provide more effective co-ordination of overall funding policy and strengthened accountability over the use of large and growing sums of public money, to the ultimate benefit of both the arts and the taxpayer.

The introduction and development of corporate planning for the national museums and galleries and other non-departmental bodies, linked to the three-year funding programme.

The major expansion schemes at some national museums and galleries, including the Clore gallery at the Tate, the new Tate gallery in Liverpool, the redevelopment of the Imperial War Museum, and the new Sainsbury wing at the National Gallery, due to open in the spring.

The setting up of the museums and galleries improvement fund—a joint initiative between Government and the Wolfson Charities, providing £4 million per year for the next three years towards the cost of priority renovation and refurbishment projects in United Kingdom museums and galleries.

New marketing initiatives to encourage arts bodies to market themselves more professionally and improve the quality of their management.

The significant upsurge in, and continued success of, business sponsorship of the arts. The business sponsorship incentive scheme has brought over £38 million of new money to the arts.

The development of incentive funding schemes for the performing arts and for public libraries, designed to encourage publicly-funded bodies to become more self-reliant in their development and growth.

The substantial progress made with the British Library's St. Pancras project. The first phase is on schedule for occupation in 1993, within its cash budget of £300 million. Books will be moved into the basements from mid-1991. And detailed design is in progress on the second phase, which will be completed in 1996. The cost of the whole project will be £450 million in cash. When the building is fully occupied, the bulk of the British Library's London-based collections will have been brought together for the first time and in modern storage conditions.

The publication of the consultative paper, "Financing our Public Library Service: Four subjects for debate", prompting possibly the widest debate on the service this century, and resulting in the protection of the core of the free public library service, through the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

EMPLOYMENT

Claimant Statistics

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for the monthly statistical periods since April 1990; if he will show for each region, and for each adjudication section in London, and for Great Britain as a whole, the number of claimants who had *(a)* been issued with warning letters for not actively seeking work, *(b)* had their claims referred to an adjudication officer for not actively seeking work, *(c)* had their claims (i) allowed and (ii) disallowed, *(d)* had their claims referred to an adjudication officer for refusing suitable employment and *(e)* been disqualified for refusing suitable employment.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the employment service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Farm Accidents

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many (i) deaths and (ii) accidents there have been on farms in Wales involving machinery and farm practices for each of the years from 1983.

Mr. Forth: The information is not available in the form requested.

The following table shows the number of fatal and other injuries occurring in the agriculture and horticulture industry in Wales from 1986-87 to 1989-90 (provisional) as reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 to the Health and Safety Executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates:

Year (commencing 1 April)	*Fatal*		*Major*		*Over three day*	
	Total	*of which involving machinery*	*Total*	*of which involving machinery*	*Total*	*of which involving machinery*
1986-87	7	—	29	4	27	3
1987-88	4	2	34	3	51	5
1988-89	12	1	45	8	50	2
1989-90[1]	7	—	34	4	54	6

[1] Provisional.

Information for earlier years was reported under different legislation and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Health and Safety (Agriculture)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement concerning health and safety in the agricultural industry.

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for health and safety in the agricultural industry rests with employers and others at the workplace.

The Health and Safety Executive is pursuing a number of strategies aimed at helping the industry to achieve reductions in the numbers of accidents.

These include: targeting inspection at those workplaces that present the greatest risk to employees, the self employed, their families and the general public including children; carrying out advisory and publicity work to promote an increased awareness of health and safety in the industry; liaising with all sides of industry to improve the health and safety aspects of products.

In seeking compliance with health and safety legislation, inspectors are using innovative inspection techniques including initiatives targeted at specific farming operations. They will also pay more attention to the management of health and safety.

Inspectors pursue their enquiries and any enforcement action to the highest levels at workplaces which do not measure up to the standards expected of them.

Employment Training

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate how many people with special needs will lose places in employment training schemes as a result of reductions in the employment training budget in the next financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My Department does not forecast the number of people with special training needs likely to enter employment training (ET).

Restart

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will update the information on Restart provided in response to the question by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), *Official Report*, 6 June 1990, column *666*

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Job Release Scheme

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will announce the results of the review of the rates of allowance payable under the job release scheme.

Mr. Jackson: Although the job release scheme closed to new applicants on 31 January 1988, the allowance will continue to be paid to participants for up to five years. Following our annual review, the allowances payable from 8 April 1991 under the job release scheme will be as follows:

Those who are married with a dependent wife whose net income from all sources does not exceed £16 a week; £90·70 taxable. Those who do not have a dependent wife or whose wife's income exceeds £16 a week: £74·70 taxable. The spouses earnings limit which affects whether the higher or lower rate is paid has been raised to £16 from £15.

Social Action Programme

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the European Commission's proposals under the social action programme on *(a)* informing and consulting employees and *(b)* proof of employment relationship.

Mr. Howard: Proposals for directives on informing and consulting employees in Community-scale undertakings and on proof of employment relationship were adopted by the European Commission on 5 December and 28 November 1990 respectively. Consultation documents inviting views on both proposals are to be issued by my Department today. Copies have been placed in the library of the House .

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what labour market and geographical criteria have been used in allocating budgets to individual training and enterprise councils; what weight was given to each of the criteria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Budget allocations to individual training and enterprise councils (TECs) are based broadly on historical spending levels in the geographical area covered by the TEC (80 per cent. of the weighting) and on the size of the client groups within the TEC's area for the programmes involved (20 per cent. of the weighting). Each TEC's budget may be adjusted according to local factors, which will be subject to negotiation between the TEC and the Department's regional director.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he first received the corporate plan of South Glamorgan TEC.

Mr. Jackson *[holding reply 14 February 1991]:* A draft of the corporate plan for South Glamorgan TEC was first received by officials on 24 September 1990.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Local Offices

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to alter the operation, or relocate workloads, from or to the Paisley or Johnstone offices of his Department;

(2) what plans there are to reduce staffing levels in the Johnstone office of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The operations and workloads of both offices are currently being considered by local management to identify the most appropriate arrangements to meet future local needs. The review of these offices is part of a much larger review involving all offices in Great Britain. It is not a device for closing them. Restructuring of the network will result in modest savings, mainly at grade 7 level. A voluntary redundancy scheme is in place for these staff.

Sexual Equality

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which benefits do not fall within the scope of EC directive 79/7/ regarding equal treatment of men and women within social security matters.

Miss Widdecombe: Article 3(1) of directive 79/7 EEC sets out what is covered by the terms of the directive, namely statutory schemes which provide protection against the risks of sickness, invalidity, old age, accidents at work and occupational diseases and unemployment. It also covers social assistance which is intended to supplement or replace those schemes.

Articles 3(2) and 7 define what is or can be excluded; notably state pensionable age.

Disability

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer of 11 December 1990 at columns *37-77*, if he will now review the mobility allowance provisions regarding the award of the benefit to the deaf-blind.

Mr. Scott: I assume that the hon. Member refers to the undertaking that I gave on 13 December 1990 at column *91* to analyse the way in which arrangements for deaf-blind people are working in practice and consider whether changes are necessary. This has now been done and immediate steps are being taken to overcome some problems which were discovered.

We intend to issue revised guidance to examining doctors to resolve these difficulties and plan to consult both SENSE (the National Deaf-Blind and Rubella Association) and the RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) to make this guidance as effective as possible. We shall continue to monitor the operation of the deaf-blind rules after these changes have been made.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the first severe weather payments, authorisied under the Prime Minister's announcement of 7 February 1991, *Official Report*, columns 408-9, will be made.

Mr. Scott: Some payments have already been made.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the locations where temperatures did not trigger off any cold weather payments in the week commencing 4 February.

Mr. Scott: The 24 weather stations listed in the table did not trigger. However, 7 February is deemed to be the trigger day for all weather stations which did not actually trigger, and all DSS offices have been instructed to action claims for cold weather payments.

Weather stations deemed to have triggered

Aberdeen airport
Boulmer
Carlisle
Coningsby
Culdrose
Edinburgh airport
Eskmeals
Kinloss
Kirkwall
Leeds weather centre
Leeming
Lerwick
Leuchars
Machrihanish
Mount Batten
Mumbles
St. Mawgen
Southampton weather centre
Stornoway
Tynemouth
Valley
Whitby coastguard
Whithorn
Wick

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if money saved by a pensioner towards funeral costs is taken into account when pensioners on income support apply for the cold weather payment; and what discretion is given to DSS offices on this.

Mr. Scott: The first £1,000 savings of anyone aged over 60 or over (or who has a partner who is 60 or over) are ignored. Any savings above that figure, for whatever purpose, are taken into account. The treatment of savings is set out in the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Regulations 1988 and DSS offices have no discretion in this area.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department is taking steps to advertise in the national and provincial press and on television and radio the cold weather payments available to those who are eligible.

Mr. Scott: Advertisements containing a form for eligible people to claim cold weather payments began to appear in Scottish local and regional newspapers in January and in England and Wales from 4 February. From Friday 15 February advertisements will also appear in appropriate national newspapers. Advertising space has not been taken on commercial television or radio but considerable publicity has been given to the payments through these media.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of the number of households who will receive a severe weather payment under the terms of the Prime Minister's announcement of 7 February 1991, *Official Report*, columns 408-9;

(2) what is his estimate of the number of households who would be eligible to claim severe weather payments in a week in which the seven consecutive days' temperature requirement is waived.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that about 2·2 million households are eligible to receive a cold weather payment for a week in which all the weather stations trigger or are deemed to trigger. The number who will receive a payment depends on the number who claim. We are undertaking extensive advertising to ensure that eligible people are aware of the payments.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of DSS offices who have paid out cold weather payments; and what is this as a percentage of all offices.

Mr. Scott: All DSS offices have been instructed to make cold weather payments.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of pensioners who are likely to be eligible for the cold weather payments; and what percentage of total pensioners this is.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that nearly 1·5 million people of pensionable age[1] are eligible to receive a cold weather payment, representing around 13 per cent. of the total number of people of pensionable age.

[1] Men aged 65 and over, and women aged 60 and over.
Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry 1989.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what legislation the Prime Minister's announcement of 7 February 1991, *Official Report*, columns 408-9, on cold weather payments, will be enacted.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend announced our intention to increase by £1 the weekly amount currently available under the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Regulations 1988. Amending regulations will be laid shortly.

Where a local weather station has triggered, local offices are instructed to make payments of £6, of which £5 is within the current statutory framework and the additional £1 is on an extra statutory basis. In areas where the local weather station has not triggered, ex gratia payments of £6 will be made.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long the current waiving of the cold weather payments regulations will endure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 12 February we shall continue to monitor the situation carefully and if the exceptionally cold weather continues we shall take similar measures.

Pensioners

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total number of pensioners who do not claim income support to which they would be entitled; and how many of these have savings below £1,000.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available. Estimates of take-up for the income-related benefits introduced following the 1988 reforms will be published in due course from the 1989 family expenditure survey.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of pensioners claiming income support who have savings of less than £1,000.

Miss Widdecombe: We estimate that, including partners, there are nearly 1·5 million people of pensionable age[1] claiming income support who have savings of less than £1,000.

(*Source:* Annual Statistical Enquiry 1989)

[1] Men aged 65 and over, and women aged 60 and over.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance has been issued to local offices about the recipients of invalidity benefit undertaking voluntary work following the supplementary evidence submitted by his Department to the Public Accounts Committee subsequent to the appearance of the Permanent Secretary at the Public Accounts Committee on 7 February.

Mr. Scott: Revised instructions about the effect of voluntary work on entitlement to incapacity benefits were issued to the Department's social security offices in May 1990. The guidance gave examples of the type of voluntary work which could be ignored and stressed the need not to discourage claimants from taking on such work by delay in giving advice or decisions.

As the supplementary evidence submitted to the Public Accounts Committee explained, decisions on entitlement to incapacity benefits, such as invalidity benefit, are made by the independent statutory adjudicating authorities.

WALES

Mental Handicap

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to amend the guidelines for implementing the all-Wales strategy for the development of services for people with a mental handicap.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The basic guidelines on implementing the all-Wales strategy remain unchanged and are set out in the original strategy document published in March 1983.

Administrative guidance—covering for example the format and content of annual reports and of three-year forward plans under the strategy—is issued to county joint planning teams and updated each year. A copy of the latest version of the guidelines has been placed in the Library of the House. A comprehensive review of the strategy is in progress and involves wide consultation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider, in the light of the review, what arrangements should be made to maintain and further develop services beyond the strategy's original 10-year term.

Regional Enterprise Grants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number and value of applications for regional enterprise grants in Wales by each quarter of 1989 and 1990.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Period	*Scheme*	*Number of applications*	*Project costs (application stage) (£'000)*
1 January to 31 March 1989	RIG	127	11,979
	RIN	36	5,223
1 April to 30 June 1989	RIG	87	4,165
	RIN	30	4,485
1 July to 30 September 1989	RIG	81	4,920
	RIN	18	1,863
1 October to 31 December 1989	RIG	82	5,188
	RIN	20	2,975
1 January to 31 March 1990	RIG	78	4,209
	RIN	19	2,030
1 April to 30 June 1990	RIG	60	3,161
	RIN	22	2,548
1 July to 30 September 1990	RIG	70	4,787
	RIN	26	4,696
1 October to 31 December 1990	RIG	61	3,881
	RIN	19	1,082

RIG = Regional investment grant.
RIN = Regional innovation grant.

Sheep Farming

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning sheep farming in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh sheep industry contributes about 24 per cent. of the total value of agricultural output. The breeding flock has expanded steadily—by nearly a million—over the last decade and now stands at 5·1 million head. In 1991, sheep producers in the LFA will benefit from substantial increases in the rate of HLCA payments and a supplement of 4 ecu to the sheep annual premium which together will increase the support payments to producers in Wales by £18 million.

Cattle Rearing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning cattle rearing in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures relating to the size of the cattle rearing herd in Wales since 1986 and the value of the output are shown in the table:

	Dairy breeding herd (thousand head)	*Percentage change over previous years*	*Beef breeding herd (thousand head)*	*Percentage change over previous years*	*Value of output (£ thousands)*	*Percentage change over previous years*
1986	364·9	—	172·9	—	207,754	—
1987	352·8	−3·3	178·8	3·4	230,204	10·8
1988	336·8	−4·5	182·3	2·0	231,118	0·4
1989	329·9	−2·1	194·3	6·6	252,985	9·5
1990	327·0	−0·9	203·9	5·0	234,299	−7·4

Pigs, Plants and Poultry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning (i) pig rearing, (ii) horticulture and (iii) the poultry industry in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures for the number of pigs and poultry and for the area of horticulture crops together with the value of their output in Wales in each of the five years since 1986 are as given in the following tables:

Pig rearing

	Total breeding herd (Thousand head)	*Percentage change over previous year*	*Value of Output £ (thousands)*	*Percentage change over previous year*
1986	16·2	—	18,804	—
1987	15·5	− 3·9	19,738	5·0
1988	14·6	− 6·3	12,181	−38·3
1989	12·7	−12·9	14,794	21·5
1990	12·0	− 5·1	[1] 14,136	[1] − 4·4

[1] Forecast.

Poultry (excludes ducks, geese, turkeys and guinea fowl)

	Total fowls (thousands)	*Percentage change over previous year*	*Value of output £ thousands*	*Percentage change over previous year*
1986	6,677·6	—	37,035	—
1987	6,832·5	2·3	38,374	3·6
1988	6,986·1	2·2	38,176	−0·5
1989	6,767·0	−3·1	37,609	−1·5
1990	6,708·7	−0·9	41,114	9·3

Horticulture

	Total area under horticulture (Thousand hectares)	*Percentage change over previous years*	*Value of output £ thousands*	*Percentage change over previous year*
1986	1·6	—	17,102	—
1987	1·6	2·2	18,271	6·8
1988	1·6	2·2	19,476	6·6
1989	1·5	−7·5	20,250	4·0
1990	1·6	6·9	22,328	10·3

Dairy Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the dairy industry in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I recognise the importance of the dairy industry to Welsh agriculture. I will continue to seek to ensure that the industry is able to compete effectively and on equal terms with its counterparts in other member states.

Training

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to give encouragement to individuals to improve their skills.

Mr. David Hunt: The seven training and enterprise councils in Wales are all developing proposals to encourage individuals to improve their skills and increase their commitment to their own training and self development. The investors in people aimed at encouraging employers to plan, act and review the training needs of all their employees. Career development loans offer

valuable help to individuals who wish to train but lack the financial means to do so and the professional industrial and commercial updating programme recognises the need of employed people for training and aims to update the skills of the Welsh workforce. We have also introduced a new initiative to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of the unemployed and those in work which will be overseen by the adult literacy and basic skills unit and will involve a series of pilot projects in England and Wales.

Our education reforms are designed to raise the standards of young people in schools and will ensure that all pupils follow a curriculum designed to encourage them to achieve their full potential and prepare them for work. Pupils of all abilities should have a full opportunity to have a vocational start to their studies. The vocational examining bodies have been invited to play a key part in this by offering qualifications relating to the whole of the national curriculum or relevant aspects of it. The training credit pilots should encourage young people to take responsibility for their own training. We will be monitoring the achievements of the pilot to assess their impact on young people's motivation.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to meet Sir Bryan Wolfson of the national training task force to discuss improved skills training in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Welsh Office Ministers regularly discuss skills training in Wales with Sir Melvyn Rosser, who is a member of the national training task force.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to meet members of the CBI and TUC to discuss training in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have already discussed training in Wales with both bodies and expect to do so again when next I meet them.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to the chairmen of the Welsh health authorities concerning capital expenditure dependent on hospital closures being initiated by them before he has made public his verdict on these proposed hospital closures.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: District health authorities are well aware of the need to be able to defend any investment decisions they make in both value for money and service terms.

Glan Ely Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority regarding expenditure on upgrading wards at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital Rhydlafar, to accommodate geriatric patients now at Glan Ely Hospital, prior to any announcement from him regarding the future at Glan Ely hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None.

NHS Property Holding Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost of the national health service property holding agency for Wales in its first full year of operation.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave on 16 January 1991 at col. *520* and to the letter sent to him on 16 January 1991 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House.

Since the principles have not yet been agreed on which to take forward consultation, it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Health Service

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the number of cancelled operating sessions, *(b)* the number of operating sessions and *(c)* the average number of operations per session in each health authority in the latest available year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many qualified teachers of *(a)* art and *(b)* computer studies there are in the high schools of Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the numbers of teachers and their qualifications is given in the Welsh Education Statistics Bulletin: No. 7 Secondary School Staffing Survey (1989), copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. Table 5.5 provides an analysis of a teacher's highest qualification in any subject.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he has taken to assist local education authorities in Wales to provide computer studies courses; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A five-year strategy was introduced in 1988 to encourage the use of information technology across the whole curriculum. Funding under the education support grant and local education training grant (LEATGS) schemes for the purchase of computer hardware for schools, employment of advisory teachers and teacher training programmes has supported expenditure of £5·7 million since 1988. Further expenditure in excess of £2·3 million has been approved for 1991-92.

Additionally since 1987 more than £200,000 has been made available to local education authorities under the LEATGS scheme to ensure that further education teachers are confident and competent in the use of information technology in their teaching.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the calculations underlying increasing Alyn and Deeside district council's revenue support grant for 1991-92 by £13,000; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Alyn and Deeside's entitlement to revenue support grant is based on the formula ([S−N−(P×C)]) which is set out in section C of the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 2) approved by the House on 29 January.

The relevant values attributable to Alyn and Deeside for 1991-92 under the formula are:

S (£000)	7,960
N (£000)	2,243
P×C (£000)	2,109
P	56,125
C	37·57

Revenue support grant is a component of overall aggregate external finance. Alyn and Deeside's aggregate external finance for 1991-92 is £5,851,619, an increase of 8·4 per cent. on 1990-91.

Farm and Countryside Service

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he is making in Wales when the Farm and Countryside Service is established as a separate agency in April 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: I have, in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, considered carefully the future of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS). We looked at a number of proposals. Among the factors we took into account were the need for the new agency arrangements properly to reflect the respective responsibilities of my right hon. Friend and myself; the range and depth of the advisory services which could be offered; the interests of existing staff; and comparative costs. My principal concern was that the farming community in Wales should have access to the best possible advice in the years ahead. I have concluded that a joint England and Wales Agency having a distinctive Welsh management, with appropriate Welsh Office representation on its Ownership Board and responsible jointly to my right hon. Friend and me is the arrangement that would best meet the needs of the industry in Wales. Planning work is now therefore proceeding on that basis.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SESSION 1990–91

4th February—15th February, 1991

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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